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Liberating intimacy: Communicative virtuosity and the realized sociality of Ch'an enlightenment

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LIBERATING INTIMACY: COMMUNICATIVE VIRTUOSITY AND THE REALIZED SOCIALITY OF CH'AN ENLIGHTENMENT

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ABSTRACT

The development of Ch'an Buddhism, especially in the period from Hui-neng to Lin-chi, can best be understood as an exemplary articulation of what shall be termed Social Buddhism. The crucial features of such a conception of Ch'an are: first, a movement away from situating the paradigmatic locus of enlightenment in private experience to seeing it as the concrete narrativity of lived interpersonality; and, secondly, a shift away from taking enlightenment to be a state--whether of consciousness, superlative moral integrity or individually initiated activity--to seeing it as virtuosically improvised conduct. That is, Ch'an enlightenment is never the attainment of a single individual, but the dramatic transformation of an entire world.

The first half of the dissertation develops the necessary conceptual tools for understanding the above re-orientation. Beginning with a revisioning of suffering and founded on the critical distinction of social and societal orientations of conduct, this section pivots on a re-evaluation of the nature of personhood and the proposal that persons be seen as narration or the dramatically ordered dissolution of both 'self' and 'other.' Following a sketch of the implications for change (i.e., the transition from sentient being to buddhahood) that are implied by the inversion of the typical precedence of being over value required by a practical embrace of the emptiness of all things, Part One culminates with a preliminary laying out of the groundwork for a concursive (as opposed to discursive) theory of communication and meaning--a theory needed in order to fully understand the significance of the claim oft repeated by the Buddha and the patriarchs of Ch'an that they have nothing to either teach or transmit.

Part Two directly addresses the relation of Buddhist practice and Buddhist enlightenment. Far from being held up as exemplary forms of Ch'an practice, both sitting meditation and the infamous "shock tactics" of masters like Ma-tsu and Lin-chi are held to be energy techniques that are a useful but insufficient adjunct to the realization of Ch'an enlightenment. Instead, it is argued that the practice of Ch'an is best seen as a systematic relinquishing of all horizons to readiness, responsibility and relevance. Ch'an Buddhist practice is nothing short of the unprecedented birth of the Pure Land, the incomparable opening up of a dramatically new buddha-realm.

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PREFACE

Having been asked to ascend the high seat in the dharma hall and speak about Buddhist enlightenment, the great Ch'an master Lin-chi begins by noting that according to the Ch'an lineage no sooner have you opened your mouth to declare anything about this great matter than you have made a mistake. And yet, he adds, if nothing at all is said, the assembled monks, nuns, and laypersons will have no place on which to gain a footing and will undoubtedly remain as stuck as they must have been to make their request in the first place.

Given this, he wonders out loud, "How, then, can I conceal the unifying thread, the social nexus (*kang*) of the lineage?" (T 1985.496b)[1] How, that is, can he not openly display what both binds all the buddhas, bodhisattvas and patriarchs into a single family and what ultimately allows us to truly realize their understanding as our own? In immediate and energetic answer to his own question, Lin-chi poses a challenge: "Are there any capable persons to enter into contest (*chan*), straightaway deploying their forces and unfurling their banners? If so, come before the assembly and give visible evidence of it!" (T 1985.496C)

Crucially for the nature of the conversation on which we are ourselves just embarking, instead of discoursing on the sutras, speaking about his own entry into the status of a master, or sitting down in meditative repose to manifest in turn the deepening phases of a revolution in awareness, Lin-chi asks for a worthy battle partner--someone to engage in the complete unpredictability of combat (*chan*). What Lin-chi's challenge makes clear and what we shall spend the remainder of our time together here trying to adequately understand is that the key to Ch'an enlightenment--the 'place' from which it is possible to be fully realized and not merely talked or thought about--is direct,

communicative crisis. That is, enlightenment has to do with relationship--not with any one individual's attainments--and in particular with the kinds of relationship in which everything is at stake and nothing is in principle excluded as impossible. In short, I will maintain that what Lin-chi's response means is that we should not see Ch'an enlightenment as private and experiential in nature, but as irreducibly and intimately social.

This conclusion is bound to raise eyebrows. It has, in fact, become virtually canonical that Ch'an is an iconoclastic and contemplative (as opposed to scholarly) form of Buddhism which has from its earliest incarnations been a Janus-faced quest for an immediate and individual realization of our original nature or Buddha-mind. According to the prevailing caricatures, in one of its visages can be traced a lineage branching off with Hui-neng and his "Southern School" and culminating in the almost militant dispositions of Rinzai Zen. In the other, a continuous line is seen running from Bodhidharma through the "Northern School" and on to the one-pointed quietism of Soto Zen.

As the standard account would have it, in the former lineage the practical emphasis in realising our buddha-nature is on fathoming the public records (Ch: *kung-an*, J:*koan*) of the tradition--records which encapsulate the enlightening encounter of master and student and which could for this reason be seen as a precedent for seeing liberation itself as public and social were it not for the fact that the behaviour of all the relevant parties almost unilaterally seems to be anti-social where it is not simply incomprehensible. That is, the tradition's *kung-an* collections are rife with instances of shouting, kicking, striking, cursing and apparent abuses of logic--collectively referred to as "shock tactics"--which hardly seem consistent with the Buddhist ideal of compassionate non-attachment and which certainly seem to be at odds with any claim

that Ch'an enlightenment be deemed "irreducibly social." To the contrary, the public cases can often be seen as portraying Ch'an masters as apparently insensitive and intractably clever adversaries whose behaviour may be intended as "grandmotherly" and in the student's best interest, but which it is nearly impossible to avoid seeing as anarchic and at times virtually sociopathic. Consider, for example, Nan-chuan's dismemberment of the temple cat, Chu-ti's severing of his attendant's finger, and Ma-tsu's propensity for delivering bone-cracking kicks and punches.

In the latter and literally more sedate (Soto) tradition, the emphasis is on the much less flamboyant practice of silent meditation--an "inner work" which is said to directly express our enlightened nature and yet for all intents and purposes renders the presence of others entirely adventitious. Silent meditation is not antisocial like an unprovoked slap in the face or the dismemberment of the monastery cat, but it is difficult to not see it as an asocial undertaking in which others may at best figure as independent and perhaps parallel travellers on the path to enlightenment and never as indispensible partners in its realization.

On the one hand, then, there is a view of Ch'an as valorizing disturbingly confrontational behaviour, and on the other hand as fostering a profound withdrawal from worldly relationship. In neither is there any apparent precedent for claiming that either the enlightenment proper to Ch'an or the preferred practices by means of which it is realized or expressed are inherently social.[2] To the contrary, under the aegis of both views, Ch'an enlightenment is taken to be profoundly individual even if admittedly oriented toward the liberation of all beings in keeping with the general persuasion of the Mahayana.

Moreover, because of the typically unbroken bias of the Indo-european traditions for seeing knowledge, wisdom and hence spiritual realization or liberation as the attainments of concrete individuals and not as in any significant sense fundamentally

communal, the individuality of enlightenment is itself taken to be a rational necessity. In short, because human action is seen as a function of conscious choices or intentions formulated on the basis of what we know or understand, and since knowledge and understanding are taken to be subjectively experienced and (at least ideally) objectively describable transformations of some 'one', even if enlightenment were seen in terms of performance and not some exhalted state of mind, it would still be the doing of a particular individual. And so, while knowledge, wisdom and perhaps even enlightenment itself may well be thought of as transmissable from one individual to another by usually linguistic means, the very fact that we see this as a **transmission**--as the breaching of an original and ultimately unmitigated disparity--only underscores our commitment to seeing our selves as atomic integers. Even when we allow the possibility of simultaneous realization, the presumption is that something happens in two distinct places at once and not that it is this very disparity between 'here' and 'there' or 'me' and 'you' which has been alleviated.[3]

In keeping with both this bias toward seeing individuals or things and not relations as fundamental and a corollary tendency to take self-reflection or self-consciousness as necessary features of any higher order--that is, non-instinctive and non-impersonal--knowing or doing, even if there are sutras which deny the presence of any objective marks allowing us to identify the transformation referred to as "enlightenment," we nevertheless presume it to have an indispensible subjective correlate: the experience of liberation. That is, because we typically take self-consciousness to be one of the singly most important and thoroughly positive features of what it means to be human, and since becoming enlightened is perhaps the most profound and excellent human endeavor, we presume that we will know when it happens--that it will mark a watershed in our awareness of our selves. As will be discussed at some length in Chapter 8, this is true

even when we are well-informed about the Buddhist alliance of enlightenment and the doctrine of no-self. We simply take it for granted that while formulating an answer to the question--"how does it feel to be enlightened?"--may be difficult, this must be due to some inadequacy of our language and not because there may in actuality be no such identifiable feeling.

By contrast, the primary thrust of our conversation here will be to develop a theoretical alternative to the foundations of both of the above biases and the conclusions toward which they direct us. In very brief, we will be working to develop conceptions of suffering, personhood, sociality, causation, communication, meaning and practice which will allow us to intelligibly support the claim that Ch'an enlightenment is neither individually attained nor experiential, neither an objective nor a subjective phenomenon, but a virtuosic reorientation of conduct--a transformation which is thus irreducibly interpersonal.

At an ontological level this will entail a thorough inversion of the usual relationship between existence/being and value/orientation. Rather than taking existence as the fundament or basis of all value, as the precedent for any orientation, it will be maintained that a consistently Buddhist ontology necessitates seeing existence as a function of and not the originating nexus of value. Aside from the ramifications this will have for how we conceive knowledge, meaning and communication, this inversion opens up the possibility of undertaking and maintaining the Buddhist equivalent of the Copernican revolution--a revolution by means of which the 'self' is divested of its long-presumed centrality and priority and conduct itself rather than either experience or action is seen as what ultimately matters.

As the wording of this claim suggests, conduct cannot be taken to be synonymous with behaviour. In the service of at least verbally marking their incommensurability, it

may be noted that the word "conduct" derives from the Latin *conducere* (*com*/together+*ducere*/to lead) as its past participle and so can be understood as "having been led together," suggesting the further Buddhist gloss of "evident karmic connection." In this sense, conduct arises conditionally as mutual articulation or personal expression. Since "conduct" is also cognate with "conduce" and "conducive" we can include within its connotational field helpfulness or contribution. Conduct is thus best seen as a contributory or **furthering relationship**. By contrast, "behaviour" proceeds from the Middle English *be*/thoroughly+*have*/to hold oneself and thus implies individuality rather than communality, possession rather than contribution, and a reflexive rather than radiating and appreciative concern--a concern which gathers and holds value rather than offering it.

All of this is implied by the Chinese *hsing*[A]. Originally, *hsing*[A] had the primary connotations of walking or walkways and doing in the sense of working. Indeed, of the twenty or so most common terms incorporating the *hsing*[A] radical, fully half have the meaning of a road, marketplace or thoroughfare. Walking connects us, establishing and maintaining in the most concrete fashion possible our ongoing interrelation. No path or thoroughfare proceeds from wilderness or desert to more of the same, but only from family to family, from village to village. Our roads and the markets lining them are evidence of the diverse manners in which we are continually being led together, the unique ways in which we benefit and share with and in one another's labor. In short, *hsing*[A] is the mode of our mutual contribution or furthering. Hence the secondary meanings of *hsing*[A] as business or trade; meanings, it should be noted, that are held in common with *yeh* or karma.

Moreover, since *hsing*[A] was also used as as a translation of both *saṃskāra*--habitual dispositions, and *bhāvanā*--Buddhist practice, conduct should not be taken as

referring to one particular type of being led together or karmic connection. Like the English "length" which entails both shortness and longness, the Chinese *hsing*[A] or conduct entails the entire spectrum obtaining between binding relationships and those that are enlightening. In short, the nature of conduct is a function of orientation: polarized on the one hand toward establishing, maintaining or undermining universally adhered to structures of regulated behaviour with an aim of realising agreement, and on the other toward establishing, maintaining or undermining jointly improvised and harmonious narratives--what we shall term the societal and the social, respectively. In the former, our relations with others are taken to be external in nature and communication is understood in terms of discourse--literally the flowing apart of those present, their articulation as distinct individuals or 'selves'. In the later, relations are understood as internal, in terms of interpenetration, and communication is not an exchange or influence but concourse--flowing together in creative integration or harmony.

Thus understood, conduct is the original nature (*pen hsing*) to which Hui-neng directs us in his exhortation for us to look into our own nature and become buddhas (PS 2). Oriented societally, conduct spawns sentient beings with all their conflicts and attempts at agreement, all their conventions for making certain that matters don't get out of hand and evidence an order based on abiding principles. Oriented socially, conduct is the flowering of incomparable buddha-lands, the furthering of the bodhisattva life, the virtuosic improvisation of intimacy. In the former, we find individuals and the various, encircling worlds of their concern ranged about them. In the latter, we participate in the campestrial generosity of authentic personhood, in the true suchness (*chen ju*) of unhindered and unhesitating enlightenment.

In keeping, then, with the vocabulary to be developed in the course of our conversation, conduct may be most simply understood as the non-localized re-

organization of an entire world as such--what we shall refer to as "narrative movement". That is, conduct does not amount to action which is individually generated (whether in mere reaction or after taking others into account) and temporally distinct, but should be seen as the unremitting realization of novel and always 'jointly' articulated world-configurations. In a word, conduct is to be understood as the originating matrix out of which 'you' and 'I' (or indeed any 'this' and 'that') have been abstracted and identified. In this sense, conduct neither refers to nor ultimately depends on what is psychological or subjective--our likes and dislikes, experiences, intentions and so on. Indeed, experience is not the necessary prelude to conduct, but rather what is culled from it by the discriminating functions of the six senses.[4] At the same time, conduct is not something purely objective--the states of our bodies, our environment and their interaction--from which we as independent observers can deduce the nature of reality. Instead, conduct should be seen as what remains when the discriminating standpoints from which subject and object are determined have been entirely eschewed.

Granted this, the conception of sociality to which we shall have recourse will arise out of our consideration of the quality of conduct itself and not out of an exhaltation of either the individual or the collective. The Weberian definition, for example, of action as behaviour to which subjective meaning attaches and social action as behaviour the subjective dimension of which involves taking into account the behaviour of others remains locked into a building block or atomistic view of the world which is irreparably at odds with the guiding insights of Buddhist ontology. In brief, the relevant distinction in determining if conduct is social will not be that of whether others are taken into account or not, since this alone tells us very little about the meaning or ramifying movement of our worlds. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, what is relevant is whether our orientation

is toward improvised or regulative relations--whether, that is, our orient is unexpected integration or the precedented maintenance of distinctions.

Among other benefits, this move away from the priority of either experience or action toward conduct as such opens up the opportunity for developing a conception of personhood that is consistent with the Buddhist doctrines of non-self and interdependence--a conception which entails seeing 'self' and 'other' as inseparable poles of an ontologicaly (even if not 'logically') prior and unmitigatedly dynamic or meaningful relationship.

Earlier it was suggested that conduct could be seen as narrative movement, at least in part to reflect its irreducible dynamism. But more importantly, the characterization of conduct in terms of narration is meant to stress the ineradicably dramatic quality of our worlds--the impossibility of reducing them to complexes of objective events which are meaningful only after the fact, as a result of what we think or say about them. Narration, in the sense in which it will be used here, is not at bottom relating as telling, but as bringing into connection, as healing or making whole. Thus, the suggestion that we see persons as narration (see Chapters 1 through 3) is not of a piece with narrative models of the self like that recently proposed by Paul Ricoeur (1993) where what is essential is the definition--the identification--of who speaks, who acts, who recounts about him or herself and who is the moral subject of imputation.(p.16) For Ricoeur, it is imperative that we move away from the philosophy of the subject--the exclusive constitution of the self in terms of what "I am"--but only to the extent that we realize that identifying our selves depends on the presence of and our interaction with others. To the contrary, from a Buddhist perspective what matters in realising who we are as persons is removing the very presumption of ontological difference, of the distinction of 'self' and 'other'--in short, of relinquishing all of the horizons by means of which we identify our own 'selves' and

those of 'others'. As will be argued below, as narration the ideal person is seen by Ch'an not as some 'one' acting **in** the world, but as that unprecedented conduct (narrative movement) by means of which entire worlds are healed: a bodhisattva, a buddha.

And so, unlike those who would claim that stories are not lived but told--implying thereby that life itself is narratively structured only through the concrete process of our talking about it, and that the world is meaningful only by imputation--I would maintain that what our telling does is not to create relations which were previously inexistent, but rather that it serves to identify or distinguish the preferred aspects of an originally ambiguous and yet irreducibly dramatic suchness. It is not, in other words, that the stories we tell--our myths, legends, histories, literatures, sciences, philosophies and religions--impose a narrative structure on what originally lacks anything like a system of dramatic relations, but that they select only what agrees with our prevailing biases.

The stories 'we' tell settle or fix what is otherwise unsettling and are thus unavoidably derivative of the ever-burgeoning narrative out of which 'you' and 'I' as identifiable beings or individuals have been carefully if not always consciously abstracted. In short, our various tellings allow us to decide what we shall claim as our own. But while telling may therefore function as our primordial means of ascertaining or comprehending 'the world' by fixing it in the 'self'-articulated forms of concretely told narrative, the narrative movement or conduct out of which we have chosen to identify our 'selves' as more or less discrete beings is by no means prohibited from blossoming in unabated creativity. The constant reference in the Mahayana texts favored by Chinese Buddhism to the interpenetration of myriad buddha-lands is in this sense a means of denying the ontological status of different places and articulating instead the realization that our 'world' is a single and limiting construal of the 'same' narrative which a buddha constitutes as a realm in which everything without exception is continuously

accomplishing the buddha-work of enlightenment. As such, conduct is the irrepressible unfolding of new worlds which our self-spoken and 'self'-articulating stories only imperfectly and obscurely mirror.

Thus, by attending to the manner in which (especially fictional) narratives re-structure experience, we can regain some sense of the nature of the world prior to our abstraction from it. At the very least, it becomes obvious that what any thing or character is ultimately rests on everything or everyone else, on the relations in which they appear as intentionally identified poles. And so, Alexis Zorba and the narrator who lovingly recounts their adventures together are--along with all the other men and women, sinners and saints peopling Kazantzakis' novel--who they are only in relation to one another. Even the Buddha from whom the narrator has gained much solace through an internal fiction called "The Dialogue of Buddha and the Shepherd" is himself ultimately indistinguishable from both the narrator and his great friend Zorba.

This is not to say, however, that as narrative movement conduct can be reduced to plot any more than it can to individual actions brought together as interaction. A plot is typically seen as the generic skeleton on which the unique flesh of a fictional narrative is hung--its characters, its historical setting, locales and so on. But narrative movement as such is, to take the organic analogy to its extreme, actually more like the evolution not just of one body or species but of an entire eco-system--in short, a world. Crucial to understanding a truly Buddhist conception of suffering--what we shall characterize in Chapters 1 and 2 as narrative interruption--while this evolution can be broken or diverted at any point in the system, it is always the entire system, the entire world which is forced to change or transform itself. And so, while only a single individual may be hurt, it is always our whole world, our whole narration which must eventually be healed in the lively concourse or flowing together which epitomizes Ch'an communication.[5]

While the foregoing hopefully gives an indication of the course we will be following in rectifying the theoretical underpinnings of Ch'an enlightenment, on a more practical level and as unpalatable as it may be both to scholars accepting the Southern/Northern or Rinzai/Soto division of Ch'an as textually justified, and to adherents of one or the other of the two schools who accept it as empirically grounded, part of the purpose of our conversation will be to realize a drastic revisioning of Ch'an practice whereby both of its 'faces' are seen as unfortunately separated and erroneously vaunted phases of an originally whole system of personal realization. That is, the famous shock tactics of the Rinzai lineage and the silent meditation of Soto--what shall be referred to respectively as the techniques of partnership and indirection--will be held to be merely useful and preparatory artifices or energy-work and not the embodiment of either Buddhist enlightenment or practice. In short, the position regarding the practice of Ch'an which we will be articulating over the course of Part II will entail seeing that while the Janus-like nature of Ch'an is indeed a function of its systemic structure, the incommensurability of these technically diverse aspects is inherent only to our typical perspectives on it--our failure to unhesitatingly embody and not merely study and think about Ch'an.

One of the most likely criticisms that will be levelled against what follows is that there is in the Canon very little direct precedent for the vocabulary being forwarded as uniquely suitable for understanding the meaning of the sociality of Ch'an enlightenment. It cannot be denied that terms like "narrative", "sociality", "societality", "virtuosity", "intimacy," and "indirection" are inextricably bound up with our present concerns and lives and reflect a sensibility in no way directly groundable in canonical Buddhism. Far from being a philosophical liability, however, this seems to me an altogether felicitious eventuality insofar as it forces us to drop the pretense of doing 'pure' or 'fundamental'

Buddhist scholarship. That is, the use of such a vocabulary forces us to admit what is in any case unavoidable--that much of what we say about Buddhism does not and cannot have its sole and ultimate foundation in what is past, but arises as the world of the Canon and ours are brought into lively integration or concourse.

In this sense, very little of what follows is exegetical in nature but must be acknowledged as what for lack of a better term can be called contemporary Buddhist thinking. Borrowing an analogy suggested by the novelist, Robert Pirsig, our present conversation is not a philosophological (*sic*) exercise comparable to what a musicologist does to and with a piece of music, but original Buddhist writing--an unapologetically improvisational endeavor.[6]

And so, while I will often suggest that 'such and such' is the case according to the Ch'an tradition, I do so as a contemporary 'practitioner' and exponent of Ch'an--as someone who has "gone native" and not as a philosophical archeologist taking Ch'an as an inert object of study. Indeed, in the sense in which the term will be discussed later, while much of what follows--for example the suggestions that we see persons as narration and meditation as a technique of indirection--has little if any 'factual' basis in the literature of Ch'an, I would maintain that this in no way compromises its expressing an authentic part of the **meaning** of that literature and the practice out of which it is continuously being generated. What Lin-chi meant by asking for a battle partner should not be anticipated to be something inherent either to his utterance or intention, but simply as the ongoing if often interrupted narrative that is the Ch'an lineage itself--a lineage that comprises not concrete individuals transmitting some comprehensive insights from generation to generation, but a host of deeply interpenetrating persons or worlds without horizon.

No doubt there will be some readers who will allege that while I may have appropriated some useful Ch'an Buddhist terms and found some textual support for my self-proclaimed work of original Buddhist thought, what I say is so strikingly at odds with the received tradition that it is in name only that this work can be referred to as "Buddhist". This, however, is what has often been said of Ch'an itself and with no more grounds than the denial of a genetic basis for the birth of a blue-eyed child to brown-eyed parents. Some of the themes brought to the fore in our present conversation may--like the distinction between the social and societal--be undeniably absent in the ostensive, parent traditions of both Ch'an and the transmitted forms of Indian Buddhism, but this 'fact' alone cannot in and of itself prove the illegitimacy of our present undertaking.

However, precisely because this is a philosophical dissertation and not the site of what the later Ch'an tradition came to refer to as *fa chan* or "dharma combat", I have often found it expedient to employ the artifice of conceptual polarities in opening up what would otherwise remain closed fields--things already 'known' beyond the shadows of any doubt. Far from functioning as declarations, these polarities are intended to draw attention to the limits or boundary conditions of our present understanding and not to represent some objective state of affairs or what is usually referred to as "reality". And yet, since the kind of closure that goes along with exhaustive definition is antithetical to both the premises of Buddhist 'ontology' and to the heuristic aims of these polarities, I have also found it necessary to allow the relevant distinctions to remain in some cases disturbingly ambiguous; an eventuality which will no doubt cause some discomfort in anyone believing that reality is the ultimate source, ground or cause of our values and not their entirely dependent progeny. Apologies that this simply goes along with mapping the terrain of a philosophical position like that of Ch'an Buddhism in which improvisation is accorded evaluative priority over certainty and in which all declarations of 'is' and 'is-not'

are meticulously eschewed can hardly prove satisfying for those who steadfastly adhere to other guiding premises. For that reason, none shall be offered.

Moreover, and as will be discussed at various junctures in what follows, the Buddhist sees the world or reality not only as the context of our choices or intentions, but as a subordinate function of them. Because of this, appeals to 'facts' and deductive argumentation as legitimate arbiters of philosophical dispute are granted only limited viability. As shall be seen in Chapters Four and Five, once existence is subordinated to value what constitutes a legitimate explanation or exercise of rationality can no longer be conceived in terms of deploying various "lines of reasoning" in order to achieve an incontrovertible closure or certitude with respect to some independent object of inquiry. Given the prevailing dispositions regarding what stands as properly philosophical writing, I have nevertheless tried to strike what has turned out to be an often uneasy balance between making and supporting 'points' and following the Ch'an injunction to not make anything at all. From such a precarious vantage, and as the final stages of our conversation will hopefully make at least intellectually acceptable, the full merit of our project and of the time we will be travelling together here shall become apparent only with a life-long commitment to employing the Ch'an techniques of indirection and partnership since it is only by this means that 'we' will be able to sufficiently stand aside and unblock the gateless gate of unprecentedly liberative virtuosity.[7]

PART I

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CH'AN ENLIGHTENMENT

CHAPTER 1

SUFFERING: DIVERGENT CONCEPTIONS OF THE CONTEXT OF ENLIGHTENMENT

There is no shortage of suffering. With greater or lesser intensity and profundity, each of us is at one time or another plunged into a world where things have gone awry, where a child is dying, where love goes unrequited, where pleasant illusions are being shattered, where sickness or old age cause our life to fall in on itself--a tortured parody of its customary radiance. While there may be an unfortunate few of us who pass our entire lives without ever experiencing love or success or consistently good health, none of us escapes the experience of disappointment, of sorrow or adversity or grief. Suffering, we are tempted to say, is a universal experience of mankind.

The Buddha would seem to agree. In the scriptures collected together in the Canon, the Buddha is often found remarking that he teaches only suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path to that end. Indeed, one of the central tenets of the early Buddhist catechism was that suffering (*duhkha*) is one of the three marks (*lakṣaṇa*) characterizing all existing things (*dharmas*). These remarks notwithstanding, I believe that the temptation to regard suffering as a universal experience is one we have good reasons to resist, and that the failure to do so not only paves the way to a misconstrual of the stated intention of the Buddha's teaching--bringing about the end of suffering--but to the idealization and eventual fossilization of enlightenment through a denial of its profound sociality.

In declining to accept the proposition that suffering is a universal experience I do not, of course, wish to deny that there ever a point in talking about the most general characteristics of suffering as it occurs in the immediacy of lived experience. There are

many insights which depend in large part on just such an abstraction from the uniqueness of my or your experience. Indeed, I would argue that the Buddha's articulation of the eight-fold path depends on just such an abstractive analysis undertaken in the second and third of his noble truths.[1] My contention is simply that the suffering which the Buddha sought to resolve was not this abstract or theoretical construct, but rather the actually experienced suffering of people whose lives came in some way to be intimately interwoven with his own. Most importantly for the project of warranting the uniqueness of the Ch'an contribution to the evolution of Buddhist thought and practice, this requires that we fully acknowledge the historical dimensions of suffering and resist the inclination to regard it as fundamentally a-historical--a phenomenon which has been absent from none of the countless generations of human being and which, by virtue of being universal, is always and everywhere possible. In short, while theoretical (which is to say universal) problems are necessarily resolved only by equally theoretical solutions, no theoretical solution can effectively answer to the always changing demands of actually experienced suffering. It is to these latter, irreducibly unique problems and their virtuosic resolution that Ch'an practice orients us and which ultimately provide the opportunity for realizing the sociality of Ch'an enlightenment.

This claim stands in sharp opposition to the popular view according to which it is perfectly intelligible to assert that the problems we face as individuals are universal even though our very individuality insures that our solutions will necessarily differ, even if only very slightly. An interesting formulation of this view can be found in Clifford Geertz's Interpretation of Cultures. Speaking of the nature of cultural patterns, he states that "the orientational requirements they serve are generically human. The problems being existential are universal; their solutions being human are diverse." (1973:363) That is, cultural patterns can be seen as the concrete embodiment of unique, ever-evolving and

yet relatively stable coping strategies developed by a community or communities in the face of commonly recurring problems or crises. What this amounts to saying, of course, is that the problems confronting us are not culture-specific. In the process of crisis resolution, and regardless of the nature of that crisis and the suffering it engenders, uniqueness is evident only along its reactive or responsive dimensions. No doubt this is good news for the comparative anthropologist or sociologist who can then begin to develop a cultural taxonomy based, for example, on how various communities resolve the universal problems of hunger or intergenerational aggression. It is also news typical in post-animistic, explicitly materialistic/mechanistic societies where the universe's store of creativity and will have been fully appropriated by intelligent beings such as ourselves, and where the problems we confront have no intrinsically communicative importance, but exist simply as inertia-generated, law-conforming interruptions of the smooth realization of our calculative and individual ends. Neither of these contemporary gospels can, however, stake any exclusive or absolute claims to truth. In fact, part of our present conversation's aim is the realization that they are, in the language of aphorism, attempts to have our cake and eat it, too.

At least apparently, Geertz and those of like mind would have it that our unique responses are made to a world which presents us with generic--that is, characterless--problems. They are not part of our intimate history for which we are unavoidably and personally responsible, but rather universally generated and constituted 'facts' to which we react or, awareness being on our side, respond. In brief, the causes of suffering are objective or characterized with otherness while its solutions are in the end subjective--yours or mine. The difference between this view of suffering and that proper to the Buddhist tradition can best be illustrated by examining their varied ramifications with

respect to a typical "orientational requirement" and making evident in an at least preliminary fashion that their disparity is at once metaphysical and profoundly practical.

A. Universality and Objectivity: The Dilemma of the Suffering Individual.

Take the case of hunger. It seems to us self-evident that hunger is a universal problem; that is, hunger is a discomfort which all animals regularly experience and deal with, each in their own fashion and according to their individual predilections. Eagles seek out field mice, deer seek out tender shoots and leaves, New Yorkers seek out pizza, but hunger itself--the experience of a need for nourishment--is the same regardless of the species to which one belongs. This line of reasoning seems so flawless that we are inclined to regard it as simple common sense. However, there are no grounds for such a claim other than our disposition toward rendering experience in generic terms in order to facilitate our control of it and to then lose sight of what is sacrificed in the reduction. Phenomenologically, at the level of lived experience, the hunger of an eagle is not in any relevant sense equivalent to that of a resident of the Bronx heading downstairs for a pizza. The eagle's hunger is not simply the noting of a void able to be filled generically. Were this the case, the eagle could as well swoop down to eat corn or wheat. Instead, the eagle hungers for a mouse--a furtive, watchful creature toward which it will plummet from several hundred feet in the air and with luck snare on hunt-sharpened talons. The entire complex of organic desires, physical skills, environmental set and inter-special conduct and co-ordination which describes the hunger of an eagle is at every point dissimilar to those constellated when an insurance adjuster walks around the corner and orders a pepperoni pizza. At bottom, hunger is an experienced quality of inter-special relationship, a relationship which is abstract or generic only to the extent that we enter it in a spirit of ignorance.

While there may well be a universal problem of 'hunger,' its solution must be equally universal--'eating', the consumption of 'food', and this has virtually nothing to do with the intensely personal act by means of which a mother eagle snares the youngest male of a new litter of field mice. At this point, the advocate of the received opinion is likely to throw his or her hands up in despair and complain--surely you are not going to deny that we all eat? Not at all. We all eat, and each in our own way. But what our eating solves is never the universal problem of hunger, but rather our own hunger, our specific need to literally incorporate this or that living being so that we can digest the energy bound up in their organization and further maintain and improvise with our own. And at the level of lived and not merely theoretical experience, the feeding of an eagle, a deer, a New Yorker or a Chinese from Taiwan are neither ultimately the same nor different. No actual act of eating is ever replicated exactly, nor (as the Buddhists would say) does eating itself have any abiding self-nature. The fact that it is possible to lump a great may acts together under the rubric of a single concept or word does not mean that they can in any actual sense be assimilated to or identified with one another--not, at least, in the absence of setting definite horizons for what we are willing to take as relevant. Refusing to realize this leads to a tendency to disregard the vast network of interdependencies which we focus in determining that and what something 'is'. This tendency, however, effectively cuts off the now idealized object of our concern from the whole set of the relationships which in actuality are all that constitute it.[2] And so we try to alleviate world hunger, for example, in ways so fantastically impractical that 40,000 children are dying every hour of malnutrition.

Importantly, from a Buddhist perspective, hunger is not just a particular feeling which can be legitimately isolated from the rest of a living being's unique manner of perceiving and desiring, its ways of moving and keeping still, of revealing and

concealing, of being born, procreating and dying. To make an analogy, if a living being is like a piece of improvised music, hunger may be likened to a single chord or phrase composed characteristically of several relatively distinct notes. But while this chord has a special meaning in the context of the entire piece, taken in isolation, abstracted from the harmonic structure of the piece as a whole world, it has neither unique precedents nor consequents. It is an abstraction empty of any truly musical import. The same is true of 'hunger' taken as a universal--that is, abstractly marked--phenomenon. What the word "hunger" refers to is not any actual living being's concrete realization of a need for sustenance with all the attendant considerations of how it moves and perceives and communicates, but a constellation of marks (*lakṣaṇa*) which bears no more intimate connection to the inter-special relationship felt as hunger than the group of notes referred to as a "C#min7" does to the chorus of Dave Brubeck's "Take Five." And yet, if pushed to it, we typically are not only comfortable with but adamant in asserting that pieces of music like "Take Five" are composed of chords like C#min7ths and that the crisis in Somalia is of a piece with that in Bangladesh and any other impoverished nation where 'hunger' is killing thousands every day.

At this juncture, it is highly instructive and most germane for the rest of our conversation to pause and consider in an anticipatory fashion what underlies our comfort and intellectual ardor and whether it may serve us well or ill in the attempt to understand what the Buddha (and not necessarily **we**) mean by suffering and its resolution. In very brief, the **belief** that music is composed of and with notes, chords and distinct rhythmic patterns or that hunger amounts to a condition universally identifiable in terms of felt distress in the abdominal cavity, of irritability, decreased concentration, low blood sugar and so on itself depends on the presupposition of independent or identifiable entities. In sharp contrast with that of the Buddha and his Ch'an compatriots and certain strains of

contemporary physics notwithstanding, our world-view is--as we shall see in more detail in Chapter 4--typically atomistic. Entitative existence is at some level presumed to be basic--even if the entities considered are recurrent 'processes' or even 'experiences'. Wholeness is seen under the rubric of cummulativity, of composition or construction. It is something brought about or caused, not that from which all 'things' are abstracted. And yet, this latter view more accurately describes the direction of Buddhist metaphysics in which there is an explicit refusal to assert the self-existence or independence of any 'thing'. The doctrine of *anātman* or non-self, is not nihilism--the counterpart and hence intimate complement of thingism--but a celebration of unsundered and non-abstract wholeness. It is a realization of the fact that music is only **analyzed into** 'notes' and 'chords', that living is only abstractly parceled into 'organic molecules', 'cells', 'drives' and their 'satisfactions'. These analyses may be helpful. They are surely a convenience. But they are not presumed to mirror the structure of the world has it as come to be.

In other words, the universality of 'hunger' (and more generally of 'suffering') is a function of the characterization of experience--at once an abstraction of abiding features based on a prior projection of perceptual values and the opening up of objectivity via the positing of a real difference between 'us' and what we identify as 'the same'. Especially in the Mahayana tradition of which Ch'an is ostensibly an exemplar, all marks or characteristics are **dispositional** in nature. That is, they are not revealing of or even denotative of some absolute essences or world-features originally independent of our consciousnesses' and their doings. To the contrary, what they reveal are lived inclinations and aversions rooted in an aboriginal schism of the experienced and the experiencer--a segregation which all Buddhists decry as artificial and ultimately conducive only to further suffering. Granted the "objective" existences of things and/or features, when things go awry it makes perfect sense to attempt either putting them directly back in place

or removing those things which can be identified as the cause of disruption. In a musical context, we may add or subtract notes or chords; in a criminal context, we may add or subtract people or the access they have to things which allow them to undermine a community's laws and order. In short, we are disposed to act on or in a situation to rectify it. But as we shall see in Part II, for the Ch'an Buddhist this is a highly suspect strategy, appealing as it does to a constructive model of harmony and thus embroiling us in direct effort and intention and hence the making of yet more karma. And so, the very process by means of which we hope to alleviate suffering depends on and deepens the principal conditions without which suffering itself cannot arise.

In sum, for the Buddhist, suffering cannot have an abiding self-nature and so should not be identified with any particular or set constellation of marks, no matter how convenient this identification may initially appear. What such abstractive identification fosters is not concursive harmony, but the discourse or flowing apart of a central, decision-making, action-generating, and hence karma-producing 'self' and those experiences which come about as a result of its interaction with an inferred and often resistant periphery of things (*dharmas*)--both objects and other supposed subjects.

As stated earlier, none of this is intended to deny that there is a level of generality where we can speak and reason intelligibly about suffering or hunger. What is being denied is that whatever is so discussed is ever experienced by any living creature and has any bearing on resolving the sufferings and hungers that come about in the always unique situations in which sentient beings subsist. In a word, it is neither necessary nor without exception beneficial to **discuss** hunger in order to alleviate it since the objectivity which discussion occasions distances us from the solution to lived hunger as surely as it does from that hunger itself. The importance of all this for our present conversation is that as long as we naively accept the viability of seeing suffering as a universal problem or

concern supposedly addressed by and rectified by the Buddha's teachings and (in our case) the practice of Ch'an, we will systematically read into those teachings and that practice a universality in light of which they will appear either damagingly inconsistent or as peculiar reformulations of philosophical, psychological and practical truisms with which we have long been familiar. In other words, we will understand Buddhism in general and Ch'an in particular as alternative takes on the same world and hence the same problems that our own religious, philosophical and eschatological traditions have been investigated or articulating for several millennia. Nothing could be more disastrous. What Ch'an Buddhism offers is not ultimately a new view or theory about **the** world and how it has come to be, but an entirely new world--an unprecedented narration in which value precedes and engenders all existence.

What we are onto here is a line of reasoning which is radically empiricist in the sense that it refuses to buy into the fallacy of objective sameness and difference--the fallacy that because we can **speak** objectively about things being the same or different, that they were so prior to and independently of our saying so. As will be argued at length in Chapter 4, sameness and difference both imply a selection (or more radically a projection) of horizons for relevance without which no self-identical thing can be said to exist. Speaking objectively entails (for the Buddhist) the adoption of a stance with respect to our awareness by means of which a viewer/observer comes into being. We **make** our 'selves' different from what is observed and then assume that our inability to directly and infallibly control the flow of time/events amounts to a proof of real difference between us and what happens to and about us. The circularity is vicious. If we refrain from marking our 'selves' off as different from experience and if we accept the Buddhist thesis that experience always (even if often only inevitably) conforms with intention--the doctrine of karma--we perceive no non-arbitrary distinctions between who we are and how things

have come to be. In short, speaking objectively indicates our willing or unconscious/conditional projection and acceptance of a dualistic world. Once the schism between 'self' and experienced 'other' is assumed, it can never be convincingly closed by logical or conceptual means. Suffering will seem intractable.

One important corollary of the realization that identity and difference are artifacts--characterizations which are always made and never merely discovered--is accepting that no experience can corroborate or validate any other. Experiencing is always and irreducibly unique. As the Buddha's doctrine of impermanence (*anitya*) makes clear, there are no abiding things or states, and it is only in talking about experiencing from a sufficient, often logical, distance that the appearance of sameness emerges and with it the possibility that one 'event' or 'experience' can validate and not merely enhance another. In fact, the language of classical empiricism wherein it makes sense to say that experiences of certain types "come to us" is highly problematic in that it lays an obscuring, objective gloss over the act by means of which 'experiences' are constituted--the act of setting horizons (temporal, spatial, conceptual, emotional, etc.) for relevance; what Ch'an refers to as ignoring the emptiness of all things. Experiences don't come our way, but are created--excised from the whole narration of which 'you' and 'I' are also mere abstractions. In the immediacy of the actual, the problems confronted by any living creature are always part of the fabric of experiencing, and experiencing is never generic, even if our thinking about it is.

Curiously, we already know this from an early age. In stark contrast with the received view, when we find ourselves in the midst of confronting our life's problems, we will hear nothing of their being generic. As every one of us knows who has not come out of adolescence unscathed by love, there is nothing more self-evident than the fact that the suffering we endure when we are abandoned by our lover is unlike that undergone by

anyone else at any other point in the history of the species. Family and friends may try to console us by confessing that they have had the very same feeling themselves, endured precisely the same wretched hollowness that to us seems so absolutely unique, but we will not, perhaps cannot, believe them. If we say as much, the typical rejoinder is that given sufficient time and distance we will be able to see the truth of their claims--the fact that nearly everyone at one point or another goes through the experience in whose thrall we are unfortunately imprisoned.

Reasonable as most of us think it sounds, this reiteration of the received view should, rather than setting our minds at ease, raise a host of troubling questions. First and foremost of these is, why is the recognition of the universality of our experience of suffering dependent upon placing the latter at a sufficient (temporal or logical) remove? The usual response to this invariably involves some mention of the fact that only in this way are we able to rationally reflect on our experience--to view it objectively. This is a deceptively simple move. We are easily persuaded by the mention of 'facts'. It is a 'fact' that when we are too deeply involved with someone or something that we cannot see the whole picture. We judge on the basis of the biases determined by our perspective, by our intimacy with the persons or experiences in question. Underlying this 'fact' is the conception of true knowledge as not depending on perspective. We can see what something really is only when we can attain proper closure with respect to it, when we can (as it were) see it from all sides at once, a feat necessarily involving our acting as a-historical agents, attaining what Thomas Nagel (1987) has referred to as "the view from nowhere."[3]

While we shall turn in subsequent chapters to the critical examination of the relationship between a bias toward objectivity and our conceptions of sociality, existence, knowledge, truth and meaning, it is imperative that at this point we explore the way in

which a normative insistence on objectifying the experience of suffering cannot but prejudice our understanding and perception of the 'suffering' we believe we have already endured and which it seems inevitable we shall have to experience yet again. As stated above, the rationale for viewing our experience objectively is ostensibly that it allows us to assert the existence of significant identities spanning what are apparently isolated or private streams of consciousness. In short, objectivity is meant to allow us to avoid lapsing into (or remaining stuck within) an intractably solipsistic particularism. The **possibility** of objectivity is not, of course, given *a priori*, but is admitted on the basis of our evident ability to speak intelligibly to others using words that do **not** amount to mere names. Our ability to speak of love, of grief, of hunger and the like, and to apparently be understood is taken to suggest that there is something common to all our experiences that these words either refer to or in some still unclear sense represent.

But it is also possible and quite consistent to claim that experiences which--at least on the level of a verbal report--are **like** one of my own cannot on that basis be said to be **the same** as mine and that this likeness is a function of an abstraction which depends finally on the projection of a virtual line of demarcation which violates the wholeness of the system of interdependence that experiencing makes evident. As will be argued later, adopting such a stance entails our also allowing that any assertion proposing that two experiences have the same meaning is completely unjustified. That is, if the meaning of an event or experience is found not in its precedents alone, but paradigmatically in its ramifications, then it follows that there is no absolute identity of the meanings of experiences in different lives. From such a radically non-objective standpoint, what some thing or event **is** manifestly depends on the life in which it occurs. We tend to gloss over the profound significance of this in our haste to reach agreement--though not necessarily harmony--with one another, but a moment's reflection surely

suffices to convince us that, as a part of my life history, of my story, the loss of my father differs irreducibly from the loss of your father, even when we are identical twins.

The appeal to the objectification of experience is usually justified along two separate but interwoven lines of argument. As implied by our remarks above, the first is that the objectification of experience serves to bridge the space of incommensurability surrounding experiences, thus making it possible for us to truly take others into account in our consideration of what constitutes an appropriate response to our problems. The claim here is that it is only when we divest our experience of its peculiarly personal elements that we are able to see how like others we are (or are not) and hence to better empathize with and act alongside of them. Crucial to this rationale is the **presupposition** of the unassailable privacy of personal experience, a presupposition rooted with equal tenacity in both the Cartesian and traditional Indian belief that consciousness is in some sense concealed or bound up within matter. In contrast with such a view, the Buddha's explanation of the nature of consciousness entails seeing it as an emergent system arising with the contact of a sense organ and sense object. Consciousness is then not located **in** the organism (either as a constituent element, identifying feature or transformation) but is seen as the peculiar quality of the relatedness of that organism and its environment. Consciousness is in this sense, fundamentally public, not private. A parallel, and for us particularly felicitous, examination of the nature of consciousness is undertaken by George Herbert Mead who concludes that consciousness is not a precondition of responsive behavior, but rather a result thereof; that, "far from being a precondition of the social act, the social act is a precondition of [consciousness]." (1934:18) If this is so, changes in consciousness must be seen as changes in conduct and the attempt to objectify experience by setting it at a great enough distance that we are no longer moved by it is to detach ourselves from the social context in which the creative transformation of

consciousness is paradigmatically located. Thus, while it is the case that (as will be argued later) the resolution of suffering entails a dissolution of the horizons we typically establish for ourselves as 'individuals', this is not to be seen in terms of an abstraction from social interaction--an orientation to seeing others as "like me"--but in terms of preserving the uniqueness of our own place in the world while systematically relinquishing the horizons we have hitherto projected marking off what is 'me' and 'mine' from what is 'other'. That is, we relinquish those features of our experience which lead to the assertion of either identity or difference.[4]

The second possible line of defense for the objectification of experience is that the process of objectification is seen an integral part of the larger project of rationalizing experience, of rendering it analytically intelligible in the hopes of being better able to control and direct it. And yet, two arguably quite negative consequences follow from this. If we allow that consciousness arises in a social context, in relationship, suffering must be seen as in some quite real and irreducible sense interpersonal and any attempts to control our own experience must be seen as manipulative of the experience of others. Insofar as what we take to be essential in experience is an abstraction, such manipulation necessarily disregards the concrete uniqueness of those with whom we are interacting, and in so ignoring their uniqueness, we commit an act of violence which robs them of their character, which forbids them a creative presence not only in our own lives, but theirs as well.[5]

Once we undertake objectifying experience and begin seeing our experience from the standpoint of abstraction, suffering ceases to be something which we can only work to transform and becomes instead something from which we can, and perhaps ought, to divorce ourselves. Suffering is something which we hope to leave behind, to transcend. As the following chapter will suggest, the evolution of Indian Buddhism can be seen

largely in terms of the gradual influx of such a view of suffering and a consequent transformation in the manner in which nirvana--the end of suffering--is conceived. Seen objectively, suffering is no longer me, or even in any intimate sense the 'way I am'. Rather, it becomes an affliction which is common property in the sense of being something each of us endures but which does not belong essentially to anyone. Suffering in this sense is something we can either manipulate or disown as we wish, but it is not something for which we are uniquely responsible. To be so divorced from intimacy with our own experience is the first step in the direction of no longer caring what happens to us, the first step in the transition from dwelling in a world of persons to one generically inhabited by people: a transition from conduct which is social to that which is societal.[6]

B. Narration and Personal Conduct: The Communality of Suffering and its End.

As a means of illustrating the direction in which I think it appropriate to move in coming to an effectively Buddhist understanding of suffering, I would like to take a look at an extremely rich story present in the *Therigatta* (vv. 213-223). Once, there was a young woman named Kisagotami, the wife of a wealthy man, who had apparently lost her mind because of the death of her child. Carrying her dead child, she wandered from house to house in her village, begging her neighbors to give her some medicine that could revive the baby. Finally, someone referred her to the Buddha who was staying at Jevatana.

She approached the Buddha and, throwing herself at his feet, she begged his assistance. He told her that to heal the child, he would have to have four or five mustard seeds from a house where no son, father, mother, daughter or slave had died. Thanking the Buddha, Kisagotami set out, going from door to door in search of a house where death had never entered. Finally, she reached the very outskirts of town without having found a family that had not been visited by death. She returned to the Buddha and in his quiet

presence her mind cleared. She understood the meaning of his words and from that day on was one of his devoted followers.

According to our usual set of presuppositions, the point of this story is that suffering is universal, that grief is an experience common to all of us, and one that is inevitable given the nature of sentient being. I would argue, however, that among these presuppositions is a belief in the objectivity of identity and hence in the reality of essences or universals, a belief which finds no purchase in the scheme of early Buddhism or the Ch'an tradition to which we shall later turn in some detail.[7] In fact, I would maintain that a consistently Buddhist interpretation of the story suggests that there are two alternative and profoundly practical implications of Kisagotami's trip through her village. First, she is made to realize that there is no free zone where impermanence and suffering do not reach. This is not to say that impermanence or suffering are everywhere the same, but only that there is no place in the world where one can go to avoid being confronted with changes and crises. Superficially, this means that no happiness can last indefinitely, that no good situation can be maintained forever. But more importantly for the Buddhist practitioner, the ubiquity of impermanence guarantees that no gridlock is intractable--that no matter how hopelessly stuck or stricken we feel, this bondage is also something arisen only in passing. All situations are negotiable.

Secondly, and for us most crucially, she learns that suffering always occurs in the context of a communally articulated life story. The Buddha does not simply tell her that everyone experiences such grief, but asks her to go from house to house inquiring of the inhabitants of each whether death has occurred there. It might be supposed that this is only a pedagogical device, a way of forcing a "hands on" realization. But that hardly suffices. We have to recall that Kisagotami is not just "a woman", a faceless player in a generic tale, but someone known with greater or lesser intimacy by everyone in her

village. When she knocks on a door and asks if a death has occurred in the home, rather than being answered with a brusque yes or no, her own pain will call forth that of the person she meets.

In all likelihood, she is invited into the house and haltingly told or reminded how the eldest son--a boy named Sanjaya--was to have been married just a year ago. On a routine hunting trip, he had slipped down into a ravine and broken his back against a boulder lodged in the limbs of a fallen tree. He had died a month later in the very room in which they are speaking. She would be told about the son's bride-to-be--a teenage girl who is perhaps Kisagotami's own younger cousin or niece. She would hear about the effect the death has had on Sanjaya's brothers and sisters, about how his father still could not smile even though laughter had returned to the house among the youngest children, the ones with the shortest memories. All of these people would have names and birth dates, distinctive traits and dreams. They are friends and relatives whose life stories include and are included in her own. Suffering is actually neither objective nor subjective, but profoundly and irreducibly personal and shared. By entering the homes of her neighbors and asking about the intimate fortunes of their families, Kisagotami dissolves the barrier thrown up between herself and her life-companions by her grief-induced madness. She opens herself to their stories, entering back into them in full reciprocity by re-including them once again as active partners in her own.

One of the implications of the personal nature of suffering is that its power is not a function of its being an **event**, but of its meaning-generating role in a person's life. **What** happens is decidedly less important than **how** it ramifies among all those whose stories are in even some very small way included in and inclusive of our own. The case studies of clinical psychologists amply testify to the truth of this--what proves traumatic for me and severely distorts the development of my character was for you an occurrence

of no lasting effect or importance. Being empty, events have no essential nature or significance but are like all things and at all times in open transformation.

But the assertion that suffering is personal can be misleading, and misleading in a significant way. A prevalent tendency in the dominant Indo-European philosophical tradition has been to view the person in categorical terms, to downplay the importance of being located in a unique social space and to see our selves as rational agents embodied in this or that way and acting through this or that set of roles. In his paper, "Of Masks and Men" (1985), Martin Hollis trenchantly analyzes the underpinnings of contemporary individualism, noting that the various contemporary strands in social theory agree that the identity of a person is independent of roles and social positions (p.226). If this is assumed, it is natural for suffering to be seen as either the generic distortion of equally generic agents or as the unique distortion of a self which is fundamentally autonomous. In either case, suffering is essentially abstract and irremediably private.

This interpretation of the nature of suffering, however, seems wholly inconsistent with the social and soteriological orientations not only of Buddhism, but of many of the world's cultural or religious traditions where the person is seen as a relational achievement which can only occur in a social matrix. In such cultures, the Hobbesian idea that societies are born out of the contractual agreement of pre-existing, autonomous persons or selves is simply unintelligible. Nor, at least from the Buddhist standpoint, is it any more intelligible to think of the a person as a sort of condensation out of a pre-existing, collective or group mind. From a Buddhist standpoint, this is simply another way of denying the interdependent origination of all things. What is germane at this point is not whether the Buddhist view is right or not, but that the way in which we conceive suffering depends on what we take persons to be, and what we believe such persons can reasonably expect in and from their lives.

Michael Carrithers (1985) has suggested that while according to the thinking of Durkheim and Mauss, the person is conceived as an individual human being who is a member of a significant and ordered collectivity (Carrithers' *personne*), Buddhism views the person as a psycho-physical complex present within a natural or spiritual cosmos, interacting therein with other moral agents (the *moi*). The importance of this is that whereas the predominance of a view of persons as *personne* allows, as does the caste system in classical India, for the universalization of the experience of suffering, seeing persons from the perspective of the *moi* does not. In actuality, whenever we speak of "our suffering", we are not merely making an assertion about some generic transformation of consciousness which we are at this point accidentally enduring. Rather, we are speaking the names of all our friends, relatives, and enemies and the relations established with them through the particular intentions we have formed, the karma we have created. In this sense, while suffering is irreducibly personal, unlike the pains which afflict us all from time to time no suffering is in reality "mine"--something I can possess or dispossess. And so, while suffering is always uniquely embedded in a history in which I am a principal player, it is never mine alone but always **ours**. The true locus of suffering is not the objective, so-called "natural" world of individual 'people' and 'things', but the unbreached intimacy of **narration**. Thus, it is never merely my experience which is marked with distress and gone awry, but the entire drama--the world as a whole--from which both 'you' and 'I' are only artificially (if often for apparently 'good' reasons) abstracted.

If this is so, if suffering occurs in the dramatic context of a life-narrative in which there can be no substitutions, in which no characters are generic, then the experience of suffering must have some relation to our expectations about how our narrative can and should flow. That is, unlike the biologically explicable experience of pain, suffering depends partially on who we take ourselves to be and partially on what we feel we have

reason to expect of our life-experience. As such, suffering can be seen as a function of the collision of actuality and a set of ideals and expectations which inform our particular way of telling the story of our life. Suffering is best seen, then, as an undesired interruption, blockage, or diversion of the narrative out of which our 'selves' are born and nurtured, and the extent to which it is a negative experience or not depends on how well we are able to meaningfully work this interruption into the flow of our narrative. Once again, suffering is not a thing or event with specifiable and abiding characteristics, but a lacuna, the appearance of a diverting interstice or void. In the language of Buddhist metaphysics, suffering must be seen as having no marks (*lakṣaṇa*). That is, its nature is irreducibly axial, not ontic--a function of orientational stress and impedance.

Here and throughout our conversation, there is an evident tension involved in speaking about narration and our 'selves'. In part, this is a function of the recursiveness of narration itself and in part a consequence of our 'realistically' informed belief that stories are intentionally constructed by dramatically-minded individuals out of logically and temporally prior facts or happenings. As a world, a narrative folds back on itself at many points, each typically identifying itself as a 'self' or 'I' apparently situated directly in the midst of things. Indeed, the very languages we speak are dialects of the 'self'--dialects wherein subject differs from object, where qualities adhere or inhere, where stories are told and listened to by story-tellers and their audiences. We must, however, try bearing in mind that this tension between the stories we tell about and in construction of our 'selves' or identities as 'persons' who live in 'the world' and the narration or world/person of which 'you' and 'I' are simply abstract parts is itself a function of the hubris and confusion that underlie objectification and the universalization of suffering. And so, while there may be times when grammar and stylistic considerations insist that we speak of narration as if it were something 'we' do and not that out of which 'we' arise, in actuality the very

distinction of whole and part, of creator and created, is--for the Buddhist--entirely spurious. Once again, all differences are **made**.

That the cessation of differentiating cannot be accomplished by any one of 'us' shall be crucial to understanding Ch'an practice and the unprecedentedness of Buddhist enlightenment. Just so, while as selfish individuals we tell stories about who we are, selecting these or those events as useful and rejecting others as out of character for the constitution of our 'persons', there is another 'level' at which there is no 'one' telling the story, at which we are truly persons and not merely 'self'-articulating 'persons'. As a useful analogy, think of story-tellers ('persons' or 'selves') as being like dots strung out along one side of a strip of paper and their narratives as wavy, often overlapping lines on the opposite side. A person--narration or a world in the fullest sense--is the folding of this paper into a mobius strip, a process by virtue of which the opposition of 'teller' and 'tale' is completely dissolved, rendered a function of point of view. As the analogy suggests, whether we are the same or different from our narration is a matter of orientation. As 'selves' we differ not only from each other, but from the lives we lead, the actions we undertake, the decisions we make. In the terminology of Ch'an, as 'selves' or 'persons', we live *yu-wei*, while as persons we enjoy a liberating absence of all such horizons, living wholly without precedent or *wu-wei* (regarding which distinction, see Chapters 7-9).[8]

Granted all of the above, the end of suffering is best construed not as an escape, but as the creative incorporation of what originally arises in our experience as a disruption of the order or timing of our life-narrative. Much as a jazz musician will take an accidental or mistaken chord or note and improvise with and around it, creating in the process an entirely novel passage within the context of a perhaps quite familiarly ordered piece of music, the interruptions of suffering afford us the opportunity of conducting

ourselves in new ways, of augmenting our narration in an unexpected and yet effective manner.[9]

While actuality contributes a radically unique component to our suffering, the ideals and anticipations we entertain are in large part a function of the societal and cultural milieu into which we find ourselves born. This milieu not only provides the original, raw conceptual material out of which we will fashion our sense of self, it supplies us with a horizon of possibility within which we can expect our will to be more or less effective and beyond which we are led to believe our energies would be spent in vain.

As implied by much of the recent research into the manner in which 'persons' are conceived in different cultures, we are not born of biological parents alone, but emerge as well from within a cultural matrix of which each of us is a uniquely creative articulation. Among the primary dimensions of this matrix are the linguistic, the mythic, the religious, and the technological orientations of the community under consideration. That is, what we take a person to be depends on how we speak, on the stories we have heard and tell about the archetypes of our communal experience, on the kinds of questions we pose for nature to answer and the concrete mode of our listening, and on the tools we use in insuring our continued existence. Seen in this way, persons are neither natural nor inevitable. Rather, they are narrative creations, characters who emerge in conversation--literally "turning together"--at the highly charged, karmic nexus where the vector of individuality supplied by the genetic and psychodynamic uniqueness of one's parents and the vector of commonality supplied by the matrix of cultural dimensions intersect and interdepend.[10]

Playing off the ideas forwarded by systems theorists like Ilya Prigogine (1980), we might suggest that suffering is a fundamentally personal form of chaos out of which it

is possible for new narrative orders to evolve. In this sense, the ending of suffering is not a transcendence of the embodied, feeling self, but a transformation thereof. And since the 'self' or 'person' arises only in a cultural matrix, enlightenment must itself be seen as a process of both personal and cultural transformation.

Perhaps the single most significant ramification of seeing persons as narration and of (at the same time) admitting the irreducibly personal nature of suffering is that the end of suffering is not fundamentally experiential--at least in the sense of an achieved state of consciousness--but responsive. This follows from the fact that the narrative through which our 'selves' are engendered is not private. That is, our life-story does not have the form of an autobiography composed entirely after the fact from behind the closed doors of remembered perception, but rather the form of an always ongoing conversation in which there are many partners--some of them human, some not--all of whom are capable of making wholly unexpected contributions to which we must in one way or another respond.

Depending on our actual situation and the current state of our personal narrative, our responding may be more or less direct. For example, we may simply change our minds about some state of affairs, we may say something, we might reach out for an embrace or do our best to not-respond by turning our back and suddenly getting a headache.

Typically, we think of our ability to respond as having three aspects or dimensions--the conceptual, the verbal and the bodily, all of which are usually thought of as opening us up as a function of our individual exertion or will. I would submit, however, that the limitation of our range of possible responses to thinking, speaking and doing is tied to a concept of agency which is an artifact proper perhaps to our intellectual tradition, but one that is by no means of universal currency. To the contrary, I would

argue that in the Buddhist tradition (at least in Ch'an and perhaps in the early Buddhism of the Pali Canon as well), this list of the modalities of personal response would have to be expanded to include both perceptions and emotions.[11] In brief, emotions, like perceptions, should--no less than our thoughts, speech, and deeds--be seen as phases of conduct, as modes of our unbreachable interdependence. As it shall be used hereafter, the term "response" does not necessarily connote self-consciousness even though it stands in direct contrast with the habitual or instinctive quality of mere reaction. In this sense, suffering can be seen as part of the response of an organism to its environment, as one of the phases in its conduct or coping. What Buddhism recommends is not the elimination of feeling or emotion--a detachment from suffering which would effectively sunder our wholeness and **perpetuate** the interruption of our narration--but rather the dissolution of certain habits of response or conduct and the cultivation, in their stead, of other more appropriate and flexible ways of conducting ourselves with others. Were we to persist instead in conceiving the context of enlightenment as one implying some kind of literal extinction of emotion, of being moved by and with others, it would only further entrench the desire to be the sole authors of our narrative--in effect, to deny the dependently arisen nature of persons/selves.[12] Most importantly for our present concerns, this suggests that, at least as it is commonly viewed in philosophical circles, experience is not the point. If ending suffering is finding new modes of response and if these responses are with the human world and the characters present in our communally realized life-stories, then enlightenment is necessarily social, not a private realization. What matters are not the complex transformations of our consciousnesses--the play of received impressions and the thoughts and feelings stimulated or generated by that reception--but rather the quality of our concrete harmonization with others.[13]

One of the contentions of this work as a whole is that a seminal and profoundly practical realization of the sociality of enlightenment occurred in T'ang dynasty China, and that one of the crucial conditions for this realization was the presence there of a radically different conception of the nature of suffering and hence of the thrust of the Buddha's teachings. As an initial step in substantiating this claim, I would like to set up a contrast between the broadly Indian and Chinese conceptions of suffering and personality by examining in some detail the implications of their disparate approaches, both ritually and philosophically, to the practice of ancestor worship. It is to that task that we shall turn in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

CULTURE AND THE LIMITS OF PERSONHOOD: COMMON RITUALS AND UNCOMMON TALES

All of us were born. All of us will die. With luck, we shall all become adults and contribute to the birth of a new generation. Insofar as we are merely biological organisms, these are events seemingly open to objective description--facts which can be precisely located in the world of calculateable space-time coordinates. And while it may be true that no two individuals experience these events in exactly the same place at exactly the same time, to the extent that birth, puberty, procreation and death are universal and objective organic phenomena, such differences can easily be seen as amounting to no difference at all.

But insofar as we are persons, such objectivity and universality are chimerical. As was argued in the previous chapter, to the extent that experiencing is personal, it is rooted not in the scientific world of reversible time and objective measurement, but the narration of irreducibly unique figures on a common cultural ground. Being born, being initiated into adulthood (arriving at puberty), being married (which is traditionally equivalent to procreating) and dying are processes which are undeniably personal in just this sense, and the study of these turning points reveals a great deal about the way 'persons' arise in different cultures, about what they suffer, and what is meant by liberating endeavor.

That, at least, is the approach that will be taken here in setting up a context for the argument that the recognition and practical realization of the sociality of enlightenment in the Ch'an tradition is in part a function of Buddhism's taking root in Chinese cultural soil. However, for reasons which include but are not restricted to considerations of space, only a very limited form of such an inquiry will be undertaken. While all four of the turning

points mentioned above are traditionally seen as figuring in the completion of any personal narrative, and while all are typically surrounded by a more or less complex set of culturally-prescribed rites and rituals, birth and death stand out as singularly important background elements in the narrative construction of suffering. The remainder of this chapter falls into two parts, then: first, a somewhat theoretical discussion of the narrative function of birth and death; and secondly, a practically informed examination of the personal implications attendant to a contrasting emphasis on ancestor worship (China) and on re-incarnation (India). But before directly involving ourselves in these discussions, a fairly extensive caveat is in order.

Stated in the language of description,[1] every culture prescribes a set of ritual contexts within which the seminal events in a life-narrative ought to occur, within which certain narrative threads are supplied or allowed for and others are not. In effect, these rituals serve to nurture and encourage the public embodiment of particular type(s) of selves. For example, a bar-mitzvah taking place in a Jewish family in New York and a vision quest entered upon by a young man in a Plains Indian tribe are similar in marking the transition from childhood to being an adult, but they differ quite decidedly in the narrative structures they engender and with which they are compatible. Thus, while cultures cannot ultimately determine what kinds of 'persons' arise within them, they do regulate the process whereby such 'persons' are articulated; not through the direct, external control of any given individual, but through internally deployed constraints on the structure of personal narrative and the kinds of selves foregrounded therein.

As suggested above, if suffering is not universal, but personal in nature, it is best seen as a break in our ongoing narration--that is, a disruption of our persons. Yet, it might be alleged that suffering is "part of the material" out of which we create our narratives and not their interruption. To be sure, at the level of consciously constructed narrative--

the level where 'you' and 'I' exist as relatively 'self'-made 'persons'--discomforts, challenges, and tragedies often form crucial pivots on which our tales are made to turn and in this sense are certainly appropriated elements. But that the 'events' which we refer to as challenging or tragic are so qualified indicates that they initially acted as catalysts in a transformation or reorientation of our narrative that is itself constitutive of who 'we' are--the story-tellers who consciously decide to remember and make use of them. Alternatively, these events may have been repressed or simply forgotten--lost along the way--and hence in no way serve as material for our present narrative of 'self'. In this latter case, however, their non-materiality cannot be seen as equivalent to meaninglessness or evidence of the fact that they were even unimportant for us as persons. What is 'tragic' or 'painful' or 'useful' varies from 'person' to 'person' and from time to time and is, like all 'things', a function of setting horizons of relevance, of ignoring/obscuring the unbroken emptiness of all things.

As material for our self-authored narratives, instances of suffering are indeed 'things' or 'events'. But the entitativeness that marks them as 'instances'--as a material or substance on which we may or may not draw in defining who 'we' are--is a result not only of objectifying them by separating ourselves out as 'sufferers', but of our taking the relevant, segregating horizons to be real limits. And this cannot happen without our intention, without our both making and being embroiled in the catchments of our karma.[2]

However, simply because there are, from a Buddhist perspective, no things and because any 'event' or 'material' is seen as the constitution of 'something' through a projected sundering of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), we might be led to wonder whether all 'events' should be seen as suffering. In an extreme, metaphysical sense, perhaps that would be justifiable. But suffering then becomes abstract, a general undergoing, and loses its dramatic force, its narrative importance. I would be inclined, therefore, to suggest a

polarization of interruption and augmentation. Both imply a change in our narrative, but augmentations are found agreeable--they fit. Interruptions confound us as discomforting, disagreeable, indicating that something is not fitting or working properly. This carries the sense of the Buddhist *duhkha*--a sense of being awry, productive of discontinuity.

As such, and at the level of self-narrative, suffering is a challenge that either forces us to consciously re-formulate the manner in which we are inclined to respond to others--to redirect our story--or to creatively incorporate the energy of that challenge by using it to maintain or accelerate the development to which we are currently committed.[3] Alternatively, where narration is not broken up into a 'teller' and a 'tale'--the realization of Buddhist personhood--suffering opens up the possibility of the spontaneous reconfiguration/reorientation of our world as a whole. Given the basic ambiguity of reality as understood in properly Buddhist terms, these are not, of course, meant as mutually exclusive. It is for this reason that while the Buddha was entirely correct in remarking upon enlightenment that there was nothing further needing to be done, for sentient beings living in the midst of their horizon-making distinctions, there seem to be an infinity of tasks to be undertaken and completed prior to realizing the transformation of their world into a pure buddha-land. And this in spite of their walking beside the Buddha himself. Thus, while the bodhisattvas from the buddha-field of the Tathagata Suganandhakata originally experienced our world--the realm of Sakyamuni Buddha--as noxious and impoverished, they came to realize that in fact this was completely erroneous, a function of their own unmet expectations, their own doing. (VS, Ch. 11) And so, it must be recognized that when a culture ritualizes transitions like those marked by weaning, initiation, marriage, or becoming an apprentice or a grandparent, it in effect creates channels through which narration can flow continuously and relatively unobstructed. To break out of this pattern is to risk a break in narrative continuity. In a

word, it is to suffer. In this sense, the assertion of a radically unique personality is a counter-cultural act, a rebellion which is difficult not because of the external restrictions placed on us, but because of our unwillingness or inability to face the suffering which necessarily results from that break with norms, a suffering which will be assuaged only by way of creative improvisation.

The opportunities, however, for such improvisation can never be curtailed in any significant degree by such ritually maintained contexts for the telling of our life stories. The reason for this is quite simply that precisely insofar as rituals nurture the growth of **persons**, they establish the grounds for interpersonality, for the mutual and necessarily unpredictable interaction of a more or less large group of persons. In this sense, they differ markedly from the societal orientation toward institutional interaction--that is, interactions between generic agents or "mere people". Thus, the Jewish boy and the Plains Indian youth are both given new names at their initiation and are spoken to and questioned not as "an adult", but as this irreplaceably unique person. In short, by being social in nature, the constraints of culture on personal development cannot preclude innovation, but necessarily and most concretely bring about its possibility.[4]

Hence, while it may be analytically useful to note that all cultures ritualize birth, initiation, marriage and death and to then develop, for instance, a classification of personal types based on the similarities of various forms of ritual guidance in the telling of life-narratives, it is possible to lose sight of the vibrantly improvisational nature of personal narration. The objectivity gained by such an analysis and classification does allow us to get a handle on things, to compress and make manageable the virtually infinite variation in the ways people tell their coming to adulthood or their coping with the imminence of death, but it is nevertheless the perpetration of a violence which reduces a story to mere plot structure, a life to a series of events. The great danger in this

is, of course, the tendency for us to merely talk **about** such persons, not **with** them. Description is useful, but it is only conversation that holds the promise of being truly creative.

A. Birth and Death: The Primordial Horizons of Narrativity.

If persons are narrations, birth and death cannot be essentially biological events, but are instead the always unique horizons within which it is possible for us to direct our own narratives. Like the rising and setting of the sun, far from being unaffected by the manner in which we come to know them, birth and death are functions of (both personal and cultural) perspective. Thus, whether we conceive of dying as a final end to life, as a transition to a place of judgment, or as the prelude to a new incarnation radically alters the way in which it will both figure in and reconfigure our narratives.

In keeping with their irreducibly horizonal character, birth and death differ from any of the other most decisive moments in our lives in being places at which we, as persons, can never find ourselves standing. While we can avoid being initiated or being married, these events actually become parts of our narration by our going through them first hand. This is not true of either birth or death. Whether boldly or tentatively, we may approach these places--these topics--in the stories we tell of ourselves, but we can never fully arrive.

In the case of birth, this claim seems relatively uncontroversial. While there is some evidence that it is possible to retrospectively experience our own births, such experiences at age 30 or 40 are narratively incommensurable with those that presumably occurred at our actual delivery from the womb. The case of death is more complicated. At least in the context of religious or cultural traditions where some form of conscious survival is alleged to occur following the demise of the physical body, it is effectively claimed that a person is not limited to only asymptotically approaching death, but is

capable of actually crossing over that point to experience what lies beyond. However, where the self or person is viewed narratively and where relata are **not** held to exist prior to their relations, such a continuation of consciousness after our physical demise simply represents a more or less attenuated extension of personal existence--an extension of our narration--rather than life after 'death'. Where persons are seen as intrinsically narrative realizations, death can only be the forgetfulness whereby a given narrative is broken.[5]

It might be objected that this holds true as long as we adopt an intrinsic perspective on ourselves as narratives, but that it is surely possible to avoid doing so and to be able to precisely locate the point at which birth and death occur. There are, in fact, many ethical dilemmas--what to do about abortion and the fate of comatose patients, for example--that beg us to definitively answer the question of exactly when someone comes alive and when they die. But even if one takes up an extrinsic perspective and descriptively views either their own or someone else's life, neither birth nor death will ever be found. As long as we eschew the projection of a set of horizons for relevance within which it is possible for something to be **identified**, all we can see are birthing and dying, processes which--like everything else--have no non-arbitrary limits.[6] In fact, birthing and dying are constantly interpenetrating one another, and it is just their balanced interplay which we call living. In this sense, birth and death are simply expedient abstractions, the result of a radical polarization whereby the middle, the actual, is excluded in favor of substantiating or fixing what are in reality constantly flowing horizons.

For our present concerns, what is significant about this is that it is not we who originally set the parameters of this polarization and who decide what belongs inside the horizons of birth and death and what does not. We first come to know about our birth and death only through the stories of others--only through the mediation of our families and

our culture. We realize the importance of including our birth and death in the recursively structured narratives which are our selves only because these 'events' are intrinsically intimate parts of the (not necessarily fully encompassing) narratives of our families, our friends and the more extended communities in which our own story-telling has and will be played out.[7] Birth and death are quite literally public lore. They are processes whose nature involves being witnessed, and much of the texture of our own mature narratives depends on precisely what our culture tells about them.

For this reason, it is in being born and in dying that we are most like others--not because the relevant circumstances are 'essentially the same' or because the meaning these events have in our life-stories are in any way necessarily alike, but rather because our birth and death are the places to which we can trace the emergence and resolution of our personal narrative in its fully recursive form. They mark the cardinal points at which we are witnessed emerging from and inevitably flowing back into what is a fundamentally communal story. And thus, even in societies as individualistic as our own, birth and dying are not private affairs, but are invariably announced, mattering profoundly for the story through the shared telling of which we come most intimately together.[8]

Birth and death represent, then, particularly effective focuses for identifying the disparate manners in which various cultural matrices directly contribute to the realization of both persons and the suffering they endure. Death is particularly significant in this regard because while we never anticipate our own birth[9]--taking it instead as that always unreachable place from which we have emerged as recursively structured, improvised tales--our anticipatory awareness of death serves to fold our narrative back on itself. We are repulsed by death, by its unimaginability, and that folding back (or being thrown back) on ourselves leads to full recursiveness. Our narrative begins playing explicitly into itself and realizes its fundamental incompleteness--realizes that completion is equivalent

to cessation. Death reveals itself narratively as the impossibility of continuing to move forward. We can only dwell on that stasis it or return to where we are dynamically present. And so, death lies paradoxically in a future which we will never experience and which at the same time profoundly situates us in the present.

In this respect, birth and death are in marked contrast. When we first become aware of our birth sometime in late infancy or in the toddler stage, we are already moving forward with no possibility of reversal. And yet while it is as true of birth as it is of death that it is a place we can neither reach nor go beyond, this is not in itself a cause of suffering. Although our birth lies in a past we can never retrieve, it is revealed to us as the occasion of our continual burgeoning into the future. In virtually all of the world's cultures, this is seen in a wholly positive light. To be born is almost without exception a cause for unmitigated, ritually intensified celebration. Among the world's major cultures it is only in Hindu culture that a "normal" birth is seen, at least indirectly, as suffering.[10] According to the metaphysics of the Vedas and Upanishads, birth is evidence of impropriety--evidence, that is, of a person's having formed intentions and acted in such a way as to make him/herself incapable (if not unworthy) of returning to Brahman, to universal consciousness. Embodiment is in this sense an opportunity to rectify one's mistakes, but it is also an indication of a failure to have already done so.

Interestingly, it is only in the context of being able--by way of accepting a metaphysics of re-incarnation--to anticipate our own birth that it is seen as suffering. Birth brings about a process of gradual unweaving or emergence from the communal narrative in the normal course of which we will eventually be able to recursively structure a unique narrative. It is this very burgeoning of our own narrative, however, which establishes a relation between suffering and birth--a fact of which Indian civilization seemed acutely aware. In distinguishing our selves from the cultural matrix framing our

birth and our ongoing interactions with others, we leave behind the comfort and security of the narrative ligatures by means of which a culture regulates the growth of persons. While this individuation is understood, especially in less traditional cultures, as a crucial part of our realizing who we are, it necessarily leads to greater vulnerability, to what systems-theorists refer to as increased improbability. As we move away from the culturally prescribed equilibrium, we render our selves increasingly open to interruptive crisis, to suffering.

While it is true that initiation and marriage are also anticipated and contribute profoundly to our sense of self, they typically come later in life than our first grapplings with death and, perhaps more importantly, they take on their full meaning only in the context of intensifying the structure of anticipation/recursion already brought about by narratively--that is, personally--confronting our eventual demise. Initiation accomplishes this by forcing us to address our self explicitly as a project, as the identity-forming coalescence of new goals and responsibilities. Marriage serves much the same purpose through binding us to an other who not only mirrors us but who along with us gives birth to children that literally incorporate not only our genetic endowments, but our problems and our strategies for their solution. Initiation and marriage are anticipated, then, but essentially as bridges. They convey us from one phase of personal development to another, and while our culture may provide a guiding context for our efforts to make these transitions, our eventual success is nevertheless something only we can achieve. In this sense, they are concrete modes of continuity through intentional self-transformation, connecting us to others in such a way that we are vulnerable--open to growth-inducing challenges--and yet greatly expanded.

Death, on the other hand, not only severs connections, it is in no sense our own achievement. To the contrary, it is the horizon of our ability to improvise new paths, to

either circumvent or creatively transform and incorporate what disrupts our tale. Thus, although we say that we confront our death, this is not actually the case. What we confront is our culture's story about death and so the topology of our recursion is set not by elements unique to us but held in common with our entire community. In folding back on ourselves through the anticipation of death, we are enfolding our culture and its notion of what it is to be a person. Thus, to the extent that we are fully recursive narratives, the study of death and the rituals surrounding it tell us a great deal about what persons suffer throughout their lives.

B. The Narrative Meaning of Death: The Disparity of the Indian and Chinese 'Person'.

At the time when Buddhism was being transmitted from India to China (somewhere between the 1st century BCE and the 3rd century CE), there were already long-standing traditions of ancestor worship prevalent in both cultures, and, at least at a superficial level, the primary motives and rites involved seem to have been quite similar. In both China and India we find the offering of ritually prescribed food and drink on the day of each new moon and on other significant dates in the yearly calendar, and in each case the primary motive seems to have been keeping the departed spirits happy so as to insure general prosperity in the family and in particular the birth of sufficient male progeny.

Given these similarities, one might be tempted to conclude that the function of ancestor worship in establishing and maintaining the relevant cultural matrices is practically invariant across the two cultures and that the nature of the 'person' nurtured by those matrices is likewise quite similar. As we shall see, however, the centrality of the family as a structure of deferential relationships in Chinese culture and of re-birth in that of India renders any apparent similarity at the level of either the rites themselves or the

intent behind their timely performance purely adventitious. As narratives, the Indian and Chinese 'person' are not only dissimilar, they are in many respects very nearly incommensurable.

This disparity becomes evident as soon as we ask **who** the ancestors are; that is, what place they occupy in the narration of each culture's world-view. At least by the time of the *Upanishads* and the *Purāṇas*, the story about what happens to an Indian person who dies went something like this. Following a ritual cleansing, an offering of rice balls is made and the body cremated. At this point, the family circumambulates the funeral pyre and, being instructed to neither look back nor indulge in any open show of grief, proceeds to a river or brook where they immerse themselves and wash before heading home. There, a feast is prepared and the death is celebrated. Again, lamentation may arise spontaneously, but it is ritually proscribed. On one of the following two days, the skull of the dead is shattered and placed along with the bones of the deceased in an earthenware jar which is then either thrown in a holy river or buried in consecrated ground.

According to the *Purāṇas*, with the cremation of the physical body, the deceased person acquires a subtle body (the *ātivāhika*) which is supported by daily offerings. On the tenth day, the eldest son goes to the cremation ground and offers a ball of rice (*piṇḍa*) in order to insure that the deceased can shed the *ātivāhika* body and gain that of a *preta* or ghost.

Offerings are made on each new moon for a year to sustain the *preta* body, after which time another ceremony (*ekoddiṣṭa*) is held in order to assist the discarding of the *preta* body and the transition of the dead person into the world of the ancestors or *pitṛs*. At this point, four vessels of water, sesame seeds and scents are prepared and offered. One is for the *preta*, and one each for his father, grandfather and great-grandfather. The contents of the first pot is poured into the other three while mantras are recited and from

this point on the deceased counts as the first of the *pitṛs* and the great-grandfather is dropped from the ranks of ritually attended ancestors. This marks the completion of the full set of *saṃskāras* which--spanning the time from pregnancy through assumption into the ranks of the ancestors--define full membership in the Hindu socio-religious community.[11]

While this marks the completion of a person's ritually ordered life, it is by no means the end of the cultural story told about the fate of the dead. In fact, there is a larger narrative framework within which the above story is embedded and without which the exact nature of the ancestors remains quite obscure. Typical of the various formulations of this larger narrative is the following excerpt from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*:

> Those who meditate on the truth in the forest with faith, pass into the light, from the light into the day, from the day into the half-moon of the waxing moon, from the half-month of the waxing moon into the six months which the sun travels northward, from these months into the world of the *devas*, from the world of the *devas* into the sun, from the sun into the lightning. Then one of the mind-born goes to the sphere of lightning and leads them to the *brahma-loka*.
>
> In the *brahma-loka* they live for a long time. For these there is no return. Those who, through *yajñas* (rites), gifts and austerities, conquer the worlds, pass into the smoke, from the smoke into the night, from the night into the half-month of the waning moon, from the half-month of the waning moon into the six months during which the sun travels southward, from these months into the world of the fathers (*pitṛs*), from the world of the fathers into the moon. Reaching the moon they become food. There the *devas,* as they say to King Soma, increase, decrease even to feed upon them there.
>
> When that is over, they pass into space, from space into wind, from wind into rain, from rain into the earth. Reaching the earth they become food. Again they are offered in the fire of man. Thence they are born in the fire of a woman with a view to going to other worlds [of animals, men, etc.]. Thus do they go around. But those who do not know these two ways, become insects, moths and whatever there is here that bites. (VI.2.15)

From passages like this,[12] it is clear that not everyone becomes an ancestor and that those who attain this status do not keep it.[13] In general, the Upanishads suggest that

there are four possibilities at death: {1} the person who dies has already realized his or her true nature and returns immediately back to Brahman; {2} the person becomes a *deva* and gradually attains entry to the *brahma-loka*; {3} the person becomes a *pitṛ* who, upon the exhaustion of his/her merit becomes food for the gods (*devas*) and eventually condenses and falls back to an earthly incarnation; or {4} the person, due to having led an evil life, immediately incarnates as one of the lower forms of earthly life.

What is significant about this account is that being an ancestor or *pitṛ* is only a way-station on the path to re-birth on earth. That is, an ancestor is not ultimately freed from the travails of earthly existence, but is granted a relatively brief respite in the world of the *pitṛs* on the basis of merit acquired in this life. In this sense, becoming an ancestor is simply the adoption of a new form of existence and the connection with any particular family is by no means necessary or unbreakable. Just as one can incarnate as an animal and have no further direct relationship with one's descendants, becoming an ancestor does not automatically entail maintaining a familial bond with your offspring. Moreover, insofar as the ultimate goal is to separate entirely from the finite and mortal world of action and suffering--to return to the unconditioned by realizing that the self (*ātman*) is the absolute (*brahman*)--becoming an ancestor is evidence of a failure. In this sense, it is a perversion, a turning away from the ordained path of realizing identity with the universe as a whole and toward continued relationship with (what delusively appear to be) others. To become an ancestor is to remain in bondage. The person who attains liberation is one who vaults beyond the duality of subject and object, beyond any relations whatsoever.

From the above, it should be clear that achieving ideal personhood in the context of Hindu culture is a matter of freeing oneself from all human relationships. Thus:

> when one reflects properly, one comes to know that the things of this world are as valueless as straw...all creatures--the superior, the middling, and the inferior--in

> consequence of their respective acts, are entangled in grief!...As two pieces of wood floating on the ocean come together at one time and are again separated, even such is the union of creatures in this world. Sons, grandsons, kinsmen, relatives are all of this kind. One should never feel affection for them, for separation with them is certain." (*Mahābhārata, Śāntiparva* 174.4-17)

In this context, the dutiful performance of the rites of ancestor worship, like the execution of the tasks proper to one's caste, are not meant primarily to foster human relatedness, but to prepare the person for their separation from all relations. The individuals to whom one is now related are important only insofar as they help you to realize your true nature, to separate from them entirely and to return to union with Brahman.[14] In his study of ancestor worship in India, Dakshinaranjan Shastri remarks that the motive of ancestral rites in India is "the enlargement of one's individual self." By performing the five great sacrifices, one aims to realize that the *pitṛs*, the *devas*, animals, and indeed Brahman are inseparable from us in the sense that we already contain them. Such a one "absorbs the entire universe within him. He is at once identified with the entire universe." (Shastri 1963:110) In a word, the aim of personhood is the total transcendence of place, role and relationship.

As shall become apparent, from a Chinese perspective, this is equivalent to a loss of reciprocity that is itself tantamount to a loss of personhood. To contain the universe is to be cut off from relationships with others, to live in an intrapersonal, not an interpersonal world. In a word, it is not (as for the Indian) to be liberated, but deprived.[15] The ritual process of ancestor worship illustrates this quite dramatically.

While the first step in disposing of and honoring the dead is, just as in India, a ritual cleansing of the body, the Chinese custom is not to cremate but entomb the dead, usually three days after the death occurs. Where the means are available, the burial is done in a vault in which models of servants are placed along with other useful objects, food and drink. As is made clear by the traditional belief that those bereaved by a death

are incapable of communicating with the ancestors, the dead are not immediately considered to be ancestors. On the day of the death, the family is to openly express their grief, to wail and lament and visibly alter their appearance. The children, especially, are supposed to be too upset to eat until the burial--usually three days after the death--and are to occupy themselves only with preparations for the entombment. Mourners eat a restricted diet, sleep on hard pallets, and are not to engage in their usual routines of work or study. During this period, the corpse is offered regular meals and those who come to console the family are required to also address the dead. Once the burial has occurred, a symbol of the dead is incorporated into the altar of the ancestors and they are gradually taken up into that company. Ritual offerings are made for the newly departed at various points for two years and those in deepest mourning are expected to restrict their activities through the third anniversary of the death (Ebrey 1991:16 & 23).

From the foregoing, it should be apparent that whereas the Indian sees death as a potentially permanent break from the bondage **inherent** to human embodiment and so accentuates the cleavage by destroying the body completely, the Chinese views death as a transition which one tries to mitigate or soften by treating the body of the dead as a focus of the same patterns of deference that were previously accorded to the no longer living relative. The inclusion of impersonators of the dead who actually received and consumed the offerings at ancestral rites in (especially Chou dynasty) China was not, then, mere histrionics but rather the ritual maintenance of the reciprocity enjoyed by father and son, by husband and wife.

Interestingly, while the Chinese see the relationship between the living and the dead as being one of ritually defined interdependence, they do not have anything like an explicit account of the type of existence proper to ancestors. In sharp contrast with the overarching narrative of re-birth in which there is a succession of ever more subtle bodies

and, barring the attainment of final liberation, eventual re-incarnation, the Chinese do not continue to see the dead person in terms of any particular **form**, but rather solely in terms of his or her **relations**. The person is not--as is true in India--an essence or universal self which is gradually disentangled from even the most subtle forms of bodily existence and relatedness, but is instead a contributing factor in the ongoing saga of their family. Thus, ancestors are kept well-informed about important family events--cappings, marriages, deaths and so on--and are not excluded from the day-to-day affairs of their descendants. For example, each of the many steps in arranging a marriage was traditionally to have been reported to the ancestors and three months after the wedding the new bride was to be personally and formally introduced to her husband's ancestors in their shrine. (Ebrey 1991:22)

As the quite elaborate ghost tales told and recorded throughout China illustrate, the continued ministrations of the living for the dead are understood as essential to the smooth functioning of the community. Whereas in classical India, ancestral rites were arguably carried out almost entirely for the benefit of the survivors--the exception being the injunction **against** lamentation as a way of helping the departed to let go of their human attachments--the popular Chinese belief was that the rites served to maintain an appropriate relationship between the living and the dead by means of which **both** benefited. Neglecting to perform the rites was thought to lead not only to ill for the survivors, but to eventuate the fall of the departed spirit (*shen*) from role of ancestor to that of a wandering and often malevolent ghost (*kuei*). In short, the destiny of the departed spirit is seen as a function of their always ongoing relationships with others.

This stands in very marked contrast to the cultural narrative of the *Upaniṣads* wherein the destiny of an individual is entirely a matter of their own karma--their own actions and intentions. Whereas the Indian person is judged by universal law (*ṛta*) and

migrates through the worlds accordingly--now incarnating as an insect, now as an animal, now as a god or human--the Chinese person is neither judged nor conceived of as being able to shed their humanity. That is, specifically human relationships remain both constant and crucial to the constitution of the personhood of the dead. Thus, whether embodied or not, the Chinese person or self is irreducibly human.

In his collection of essays entitled Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation, Tu Wei-ming points out that "to be fully human requires the courage and wisdom of constantly harmonizing oneself with an ever-enlarging network of relationships," (1985:21) a learning process which is seen within the Confucian tradition as carried by means of the performance of ritual (*li*). Far from being a fixed standard of outward behavior or doing what is objectively right (*yi*)--i.e., people obeying the ruler, ritual is considered to be a means of cultivating attitudes whereby true harmony arises and not mere agreement--i.e, revering the ruler. (Graham, 1989:11) Learning to properly perform a ritual is thus a means of self-transformation. As with learning (*hsueh*) generally in the Confucian tradition, this does not mean the acquisition of empirically established facts, the accumulation of new information or beliefs. Rather, learning is "a process of training the self to be responsive to the world and culture at large." (Tu 1985:68) As Chad Hansen has persuasively argued, knowledge in the Chinese tradition is best seen not--as is common in both the Indian and Western philosophical traditions--as a matter of true propositions, but rather as a "species of skill", an activity and not a state. (1981:322ff) Thus, while the ideal of the Upanishadic tradition is for the person to realize, to know, that their self (*ātman*) is no other than Brahman and to thereby be released from any binding relationships and hence any obligation, the ideal of the Confucian tradition[16] is to open up the self toward others, to become ever more responsive and responsible.[17]

To see persons in terms of the concrete and constantly deepening realization of human relationships suggests not only that self-cultivation is essentially social in nature, but that personhood is not an ontological given but an achievement. To learn who one is involves the acquisition of skills affecting not only one's outward conduct, but the conduct of one's inner attitudes or dispositions. It is not, as was the case in India, a process of **divesting** ourselves of what were taken to be the obscuring tendencies of human interconnectedness, but one of achieving the kind of creative flexibility that allows us to appropriately relate to anyone at any time whatsoever. That is, self-discovery is gaining skill in relational improvisation.

If the relational nature of personhood is granted, the Chinese practice of ancestor worship can be seen as having the consequence of insuring that everyone shows deference to someone else. What we discover in carrying out the rituals of worship is that none of us are independent agents or knowers. Instead, we are obliged to experience the fact that no living person can rise above the need to practice deferential conduct. Thus, a person should be seen as an unmitigated between-ness, a spontaneous interplay.[18,19] Moreover, if a person is understood as a focus of relations--a social phenomenon--and if suffering is irreducibly personal, it must be concluded either that the end of suffering is equivalent to a loss of personhood or that both suffering and its end are themselves essentially social.

While it is not possible to state categorically that the former is the disposition of Indian culture--both because the Indian view of the person is not fundamentally relational and because it is arguable that the loss of personhood (*pudgala*) in India ought to be seen as the attainment of our true selves (*ātman*)--the conclusion seems at least to be consistent with the presuppositions undergirding the narrative of self set forth in the *Upaniṣads* and the *Purāṇas*. For the Indian, the fall into narrative interplay which occurs with birth is a

misfortune, a galling limitation of the self from which all suffering derives. The end of suffering is logically--if not factually, as in the case of traditional ascetics--a withdrawal or detachment from sociality. The overwhelmingly most important technology of self-transformation and liberation indigenous to India was the practice of yoga--an inwardization of attention resulting eventually in an eruption out of the finite and relationally bound into mergence with Brahman. Far from being a technology applied in the midst of communal life, yoga was traditionally the province only of those who had left the home life; those who were no longer father or son, mother or daughter, husband or wife. While the philosophical significance of "leaving the home life" may have been the resolute transcendence of all egoism, the spiritual promise was that of realizing who I really am, and so the ultimate realization of personhood and of freedom from suffering entails nothing short of discounting and distancing one's self from the contingency of human relatedness.[20]

Contrary to the Indian ascetic, the Chinese sage is someone who (even in the radical Taoism of Chuang Tzu) not only does not forfeit his or her particular place in the web of human relationships, he or she takes the task of correcting or truing all these relations with others as his or her primary concern. Thus, in China birth is not seen as a loss of freedom, a binding in a negative sense, but as the establishing of one's originating relationships. Birth is entering into an intimate and enabling embrace with others, and it is only within this embrace that one's true person arises. Suffering is not--as it arguably is in Hindu India--relationship itself, but rather a certain quality, a disruption or perversion of relationship. Ending suffering is not an escape from or transcendence of relationships, but the process of rendering them always appropriate. In this sense, freedom is akin to virtuosic musicianship--skill in responding to potentially or actually disruptive contingencies in a creative and harmonious way.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIALITY AND SOCIETALITY: THE ORIENTATIONS OF CONDUCT

According to the Buddha, none of us has a self. Regardless of how things seem, there are no abiding, independently existing entities we can identify as 'me' and 'you'. To the contrary, it is claimed that we are impermanent (*anitya*) and dependently arisen (*pratītya samutpāda*). Like a bundle of reeds--the five *skandhas* of form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjñā*), impulses (*saṃskāra*) and consciousness (*vijñāna*)--each one of which stands upright only as long as all of them lean together, a person is not an isolatable integer or unity, but a community. With the removal of even a single reed, the entire structure collapses.

This analogy--like that of the chariot used by Nagasena in explaining the doctrine of *anatta* to King Milinda (*Milindapanha* II.1)--suggests that we should view persons as whole and yet inherently open systems which arise as a function of a set of sub-systems for which they act in turn as environment. That is, a person is not a "thing", but should be seen as an organizing or structuring process which has qualities or characteristics which can be predicated of none of its parts, whether considered singly or as a group.[1] To be a person is not to be a substantial entity, but rather a complex of relationships.[2]

Such a view of personhood, however, raises serious questions about the nature of sociality and the possibility of distinguishing it in any meaningful way from personality. For example, it was concluded in the preceding chapter that in Chinese culture both suffering and its end are seen as fundamentally social phenomena. This conclusion was premised both on the recognition that suffering is not a universal, but a personal phenomenon, and on the ritually embodied disposition of the Chinese to view persons as

focuses of concrete human relations and not--as in traditional Hindu culture--as ontologically independent entities. And yet, unless we have some clear idea of what distinguishes the relations that give rise to persons and hence to sociality from those that do not, simply stating that the relational nature of personhood insures the sociality of both suffering and its end says nothing more than that social phenomena arise only where there are persons. And that, unfortunately tells us very little indeed.

After all, it is evident that in India--as throughout the Graeco-Christian West where similar ontological commitments have prevailed--there has been no dearth of texts concerning themselves with matters which are explicitly treated as 'social' in nature and which seem to depend on the presence of what they (and quite likely we as well) would not hesitate to refer to as 'personal relations'. For example, the *Bhagavad-gītā's* discussion of duty in the context of the caste system and Hegel's explication of the fundamental interpersonal encounter in terms of the master-slave dialectic are undeniably accounts of social phenomenon. In both, what proves decisive in establishing the nature of sociality is the kind of relationship held to exist among various members of a community. Nevertheless, and contrary to the inclinations of (for instance) either Buddhist or Confucian metaphysics, it is assumed in both accounts that the individual is **essentially** autonomous. Although it is acknowledged that the textures of one's day-to-day experiences are a direct function of the positions and dispositions of others, persons are not seen as focuses of ontologically prior relations, but as individuals who enter into so-called social relationship with other similar individuals.

We are understandably inclined to acknowledge the relations between people in classical Indian and Chinese culture as being equally social, but granted the disparity between their respective views on the nature of personhood, it is hard to imagine how we can allay the worry that sociality is doomed to being a philosophically vacuous term as

long as we have not made quite explicit the relationship between persons and the advent of sociality. That is, in fact, the major task of the present chapter.[3]

A. Non-local Subsistence: The Ontological Mode of Relational Personhood.

One of the more challenging implications for sociality entailed by a relational view of personhood is that, strictly speaking, we are not located anywhere at all. To begin with, the impermanence of all things insures that, as persons, we are temporally indeterminate--that is, we are neither momentary (the annihilationist error) nor absolutely enduring (the eternalist error).[4] More importantly, however, if we arise interdependently, and if (as we shall discuss at some length in the following chapter) all causes are projective and not substantial in nature, we are also spatially indeterminate.

From a general systems-theoretical point of view, this amounts to saying that as a **system** of relations, we are not independent of either our environment or the sub-systems without which we could never have come about, and the standard appeal to the continuity of either our psychological or bodily states as being definitive of personal identity does nothing to undermine this fact.[5] As Gregory Bateson points out in discussing a systems-theoretical model of the self:

> The total self-corrective unit which...'thinks', 'acts' and 'decides', is a *system* whose boundaries do not at all coincide with the boundaries either of the body or of what is popularly called the 'self' or 'consciousness'. (1972:317-18)

To the contrary, it would appear that, "In the web of relationships which form what we call the self there are *no clear lines of demarcation* whereby it can be asserted, 'This is I'." (Macy 1991:110-11, emphasis added).

Such a view of personhood has profound ramifications for our understanding of what it is to be social. In short, a consistently Buddhist conception of sociality will insist on our negotiating a middle path between asserting or even assuming the priority of either

the individual (e.g., Locke, Rousseau and Vedanta) or of the collective (e.g., Durkheim, Mauss and some versions of Marx). From a Buddhist perspective, appealing to individuality as the ontological ground for sociality errs in identifying persons with either states of their body (materialism) or with their--ostensibly private--states of consciousness (subjectivism). On the other hand, appealing to the collective errs in identifying cultural/social institutions as the ontologically prior ground out of which concrete individuals emerge. In each case, we implicate ourselves in foundationalist projects that deny the irreducible interdependence of all things. The doctrine that all things are *anātman* or absent of an identifiable and enduring self applies equally to both the 'individual' and the 'collective'. In actuality, they are at best conventionally useful abstractions: ultimately, nothing like either of them exists.

As powerful and well-suited as it is to the task of theoretically modeling the Buddhist view of persons, however, systems theory is not an entirely neutral frame of reference. While it goes a long way toward dissolving the usual dichotomy of the individual and society, and hence toward stressing the spatial indeterminacy of personhood, it is not altogether clear that systems theory breaks completely with the root premise of the logic of identity and difference--the supposition that each 'thing' is self-evidently different from what it is not--on which any foundational ontology is based and which the Buddha clearly seeks to eschew in his refusal to assert either "is" or "is-not" (*SN II 7*) .[6] At the very least, the language of systems-theory happily allows for the objective differentiation and identification of systems and mere aggregates. While the boundaries between systems nested together in a working hierarchy are held to be fundamentally open and hence arguably nominal in nature, the difference between what counts as a system and what does not is taken to be unquestionably real.[7] That is, certain boundaries are taken to be something other than horizonal projections of value/relevance.

Likewise, all systems--whether those referred to as individuals or societies--are self-maintaining, relatively invariant patternings that emerge out of the ubiquitous continuum of the space-time matrix. In particular, social systems are held to be relatively autonomous entities that emerge from the association of an indeterminate number of generically conceived human beings or sub-systems to which they are finally irreducible and from which they are functionally distinct.

Thus, from a systems perspective any disparity in the way various cultures conceive persons might well be admitted to influence the exact texture of the societies to which they give rise, but not the nature of sociality itself. Society is in this sense a universal, a patterning which can be objectively described apart from any particular sub-systems it comprises.

As tempting as it is to affirm this claim, doing so would seem to involve us in perpetuating the same kind of violence that we have already argued occurs with indulging the tendency to classify personal types on the basis of similarities or differences in the manner in which various cultures ritually guide the telling of our life-narratives. Just as such a taxonomic endeavor eventuates the reduction of a life-story to a mere sequence of events by disregarding the inherently improvisational, recursive, and tirelessly ongoing nature of personal narration, viewing sociality as given in the generically conceived interaction of persons reduces sociality to a fact, something like an observed state of affairs.

If we take to heart the concerns voiced by Pierre Bourdieu about adopting an objectifying attitude in the study of social (or, given Bourdieu's ultimate preference--societal) practices, removing ourselves to the position of an outside-stander with respect to sociality would seem to be decidedly ill-advised since it disposes us toward unjustifiably **introducing into what we study the principles of our own relationship to**

it (Bourdieu 1977:2). As was remarked in regard to the problem of classifying personality types, this amounts to nothing less than fostering and legitimizing the tendency to talk **about** persons rather than **with** them. A more radical break is necessary.

Bourdieu's recommendation is that we move from speaking about social practices in terms of behaviors guided by the conscious adherence to established rules or models to speaking in terms of improvisationally organized strategies arising out of a common habitus--a set of shared, enduring dispositions that are themselves a function of locally prevailing material conditions. In this, Bourdieu seems to view practices as involving a sort of merger of the individual and the collective, a view that ostensibly blazes a well-intentioned path between the by now highly suspect extremes of subjectivism and objectivism. But his assumption that the material conditions form a base line for the evolution of the habitus and hence of our practical strategies would seem to preserve rather than dissolve the tendencies toward reduction common to all foundationalist ontologies insofar as it apparently announces a break in the interdependent origination of all things. After all, the freedom and creativity Bourdieu grants the practitioner finally amount to little more than choosing the timing according to which we allow our already fully incorporated and essentially inherited dispositions to be realized in conduct. What is primary is not improvisation as such, but the material conditions out of which both the individual and habitus originate. Unlike the Buddhist doctrine of karma which entails our seeing every aspect of the entire world as our responsibility--a result of our intentions--since each decision means a change of **every** aspect of our lives from that 'moment' on, Bourdieu's contention is apparently that our material conditions underlie our subsistence and freedom in a way that for the Buddhist is metaphysically suspect. Bourdieu would have to admit that our decisions do alter our material environment in ways which in turn further condition us--the "new" science of ecology is a scientific case study of just this

effect--but he retains an implicit adherence to the realist's and materialist's conviction that we are born **into** an objective world wherein we make choices of various levels of importance and not the Buddhists' insight that we are continually giving birth to new worlds/narratives. That is, some things (like climatic patterns) are allowed by Bourdieu to change in some degree of interdependence with our choices, but some simply are not (the laws of gravity and thermodynamics, for example). The overall pattern, it would seem, is one of relative change against a background of essential stability or sameness. Not everything is negotiable at all times.

Pushed to it, Bourdieu would undoubtedly admit that nothing is really impervious to change, but would seem to be inclined to adding that some changes are so incidental as to be negligible. Methodologically, this encourages seeing stability as the norm and change as an alteration--a seeing which constitutes 'things' and 'objects' and not a realization of their interdependent origination with our own intentions. Thus, unlike the Ch'an masters who deny the objectivity of big and small, of important and incidental or negligible change, and who claimed that at every 'moment' we can realize the reconfiguration of this samsaric world into a limitless buddha-land, Bourdieu remains locked into the ontology of transmission or point to point transformation--a commitment which would bias not only his conception of communication toward a model of exchange, but would restrict our relationship with our environment or material conditions (including our own bodies) to the essentially external one of influence.

Whereas the Buddhist contends that each choice should be seen as eventuating a completely novel world or narrative--especially since the rigid compartmentalization of past, present, and future is discouraged--the materialist or realist insists that change can propagate outward from a choice and perhaps eventually affect everything, but only in a kind of inverse proportion to each thing's distance ('temporal', 'spatial', 'conceptual' or

even 'psychic') from it as the point of origin. That is, plurality is presumed basic and with it unity and an unswerving belief in the objectivity of beginnings--something explicitly denied by the Buddha. The logic of identity and difference--of the one and the many--is preserved and deeply informs Bourdieu's account of social interaction. By analogy, whereas Buddhist ontology suggests that we see personal relations in harmonic terms--each of us permeating all the others much as the various notes in a chord fill the same space without crowding or interference, the ontology which apparently underlies Bourdieu's claims--no less than the subjectivists and objectivists from whom he would distance himself--suggests seeing these relations as a kind of contact, not a complete interpenetration. Change is accordingly seen under the broad (metaphysical) rubric of movement, typically of some identifiable 'thing' against, through, toward or away from some other 'thing' or 'things,' even where the 'others' are previous 'states' of the 'thing' in question. Entity is crucial to such a concept of change or impermanence.

There is no doubt that Bourdieu is on to something crucial in his stress on improvisation, but his claims regarding the latter's ultimate dependence on the prevailing material conditions strongly suggests that underneath his proclamation of the reciprocity of the individual and the habitus, there lies an unexpunged vector of linear determinism. Hence the entitative metaphors which circumscribe his descriptions of change. For Bourdieu, as for most realists, such a view of improvisation seems to follow immediately upon the supposition that sociality is not intrinsic to the personal, but rather arises when persons come into external contact and relation with one another, and debates about the sociality of the self or person really amount to quarrels over the extent to which the content of any given 'I' is influenced by and influences others. Sociality is not seen as an improvised harmonization and interpenetration of persons, but their structured interaction.

Thus, Bourdieu illustrates his call for a move away from the mechanics of the model by discussing the strategies inherent to settling disputes, to gift-giving and the preservation or reclamation of honor. Even in discussing kinship relations, Bourdieu insists that "in practice, the choice of one route rather than another...depends on the power relations within the domestic unit and tends to reinforce...the balance of power which makes the choice possible."(1977:43) That is, for Bourdieu our choice or freedom--the range over which we can improvise--is a function of he amount of power held by the various parties involved and the effect this localization of power has on the regulation of our interaction. In terms which we shall flesh out over the course of subsequent chapters, Bourdieu's preoccupation is not with the social, but the societal--with conduct oriented toward regulation and institution rather than improvisation and co-creation. If nothing else, the language of power relations clearly evidences the extent to which Bourdieu has not wholly overcome the biases of individualism and remains embedded in an essentially mechanistic frame of reference in which the structure of our interactions is determined by the relative strengths of our individually exerted wills.

He is not, of course, alone in this. As concerned, for example, as George Herbert Mead was over the course of his career to establish the irreducible sociality of the self and of consciousness, he nevertheless discusses the primary (pre- or proto-human) social encounter--the conversation of gestures--in terms of the antagonisms inherent to dog fights or fencing matches. When he moves on to discuss the kinds of social relation enjoined by human beings, the premise that there exists between us an objectively real difference or distance that can be bridged by either conflict or co-operation remains unchallenged. We can learn to adopt the attitudes of others in regarding them as beings like ourselves and, by internalizing these (conjectural) attitudes, give rise to what he refers to as the 'me' (1934:173ff), but there is no hint of the kind of erasure of the one-

many or self-other distinction that is a fundamental directive of a consistently Buddhist understanding of sociality. Like Bourdieu, Mead sees sociality as arising through the regulating interaction of quite separate individuals.

The point here is not that this acceptance of the existence of individuals does not in any way accord with experience, but that {1} this experience is a function of our choices/intentions, our karma, and so not a 'given' but something made, and {2} as long as individuality is presumed basic, it is impossible to either understand or freely make use of karma. That is, enlightenment will remain a mere hypothesis, just as for Mead the co-ordination of individuals remains a utilitarian or aesthetic **option**, but not an irreducible feature of narrative movement or conduct seen as such. Existence continues to precede or ground value/orientation.

And so, while Mead contrasts the highly regulated and regulating 'me' with an unpredictable and novelty-generating 'I' in his total conception of personhood, and accords the latter an important role in the process of cultural and spiritual evolution, he does so without granting this source of unprecedented creativity a role equally primordial role in the constitution of self as is granted to the 'me' and its tendency to anticipate and/or internalize the attitudes of others. The self-other distinction is **presumed** as original or given.

In effect, Bourdieu's language of "power relations" and Mead's adherence in his discussion of self to the originality of "taking the attitudes of others into account" each evidence a projection into what they are studying of the "principles of their own relation to it." Adopting the objectifying position of investigators who can describe what lies before them without in that very act changing what is described, Mead and Bourdieu discover precisely that kind of distance or threshold lying between people in their efforts at communication. In other words, it is in consequence of their assuming their

discontinuity with what they describe--their existence as independent observers--that they can both speak in an unqualified way about 'objective conditions' and 'others,' Bluntly stated, what Mead and Bourdieu have in common is not a particular view of personhood and sociality, but a jointly subscribed to belief in the objectivity of identification--a belief which inexorably leads them to view social relations in terms of regulating interaction and not harmonizing interpenetration.

Because we can and typically do identify and describe ourselves as bodies, as intending subjects, as egos, or as members of various communities, we assume that there **is** something about which all these identities are centered that makes them "mine" or "me." Whether this "something" is conceived of as substantial or not in no way alters fact that as soon as we take the problem of who we are to be synonymous with the problem of personal identity, we are committed to the differentiation of a central *ego* and a periphery of one or more *alteri*. My states of consciousness, my desires and emotions, my bodily states, and my relationships with family and friends are all constitutive of who **I am** only because they are in some way gathered together as **mine**. The ultimate basis of this gathering may perhaps remain a mystery, just like the gathering of the stars and planets in the night sky, but that all of what I identify as me or mine revolves around some center is manifestly evident. Or so our day-to-day experience tells us. As long as we remain sane, we do not become scattered into a plurality or suddenly identify ourselves as or even with our friends or neighbors.

As an experienced 'fact,' the difference of self and other is as manifestly incontestable as the difference between sunrise and sunset. For better or worse, and for all its naturalness, it is also just as much a function of point of view. As long as we are confined to the surface of the earth, we cannot but see the sun as rising and setting. We cannot but view dawn and dusk as temporally and spatially discrete events. And yet, once

we attain a sufficiently high perspective (though by no means a view from nowhere), it is possible to see--all our ordinary experience to the contrary--that sunrise and sunset form a single golden ring wedding the dark and light sides of the planet. Dawn and dusk are inseparable.[8]

Likewise for 'self' and 'other.' The assumption that a person should be identified as a central gathering of--to use J.Mohanty's felicitous phrase--various "layers of selfhood" is, at bottom, no more justified than the long-held belief that the earth is at the center of the universe. To extend the analogy, the Buddhist claim that persons are both temporally and spatially indeterminate amounts to a Copernican revolution of the self whereby it is seen that not only is the experienced centrality of our place in the world without any ultimate ontological basis, the gathering with which we identify our selves is actually a learned process of simply divorcing that over which "I" cannot exercise **direct** control. Thus, just as Copernicus exploded the determinate centrality of the earth in the heavens and helped eventuate the realization that there is in fact **no center** of the universe, a consistently Buddhist view of personhood exhorts us to relinquish our hold on our selves as the focus of all that we experience.[9] As will be argued later, this amounts to nothing other than undertaking the practice of emptiness, a practice which eventuates an evolution away from conceiving of enlightenment as a change of the status of a given individual by means of which the 'world' is left behind to seeing it as personal transformation--the realization of the Pure Land, the birth of an entirely unprecedented buddha-land.

B. Improvisation and Regulation: The Biasing of Conduct.

The manner in which fully embracing the indeterminacy of personal subsistence necessarily transforms our understanding of the nature of sociality can be illustrated by

returning to the claim made in Chapter 1 that we should see persons as recursively articulated narration.

We have already seen that, as narration, we did not burst into existence at some particular point in time, but rather that our birth is a horizon which can be approached, but never arrived at. That is, we did not **come to be** at such and such a time and place, but rather are continually **coming about** as the unfolding of a complex of relations not only between the members of a gradually articulated cast of characters--the primary of which is a nominally singular narrator--but between various times, places, actions and levels of meaning as well.

Contrary to the centrist construction of both the person and of sociality, such a life-story is not the product of the narrator--the 'I' or ego--who gradually **asserts** him/herself as the most important character in each of our tales and who expends most of his/her efforts in commenting on and plotting the course of the narrative's unfolding. The subject to whose experiences we seem to be uniquely privileged is, in fact, but a single aspect of who we are as narration. Just as a movie cannot be identified with or reduced to the musings of a voiced-over narrator, but necessarily includes other characters, a unique group of settings and locales, a soundtrack and so on, a person is a whole irreducible to even the sum of all its parts, much less to the "one" we usually refer to as "me."[10]

We may be inclined by force of habit to see ourselves primarily in terms of whoever is presently controlling the voicings of our internal dialogue, and to suppose that we can take an objective point of view with respect to our lives and indeed to the development of our selves. In fact, this is no more the case than with the narrator in a movie. Like the narrator, we may ostensibly adopt a position outside the current plot and separate ourselves from the remaining cast of characters, but in fact we never manage to transcend our narration as a whole. In identifying ourselves as narrators, we may

effectively assume a position of apparent control but we can never carry on a true meta-narrative. The best we can manage is a cleverly constructed sub-narrative which attains the appearance of comprehensiveness only by (consciously or unconsciously) objectifying and rendering generic and abstractly diminished the events and characters in our life-story. In a word, we identify everyone and everything else in the narrative in such a way that their inherent unpredictability can be disregarded and made incapable of calling us out in fully improvised response. We will then think or talk about others, but not with them. In so doing, we may well succeed in securing a relatively safe haven for the narrator to tell a well-wrought tale, but the control exerted thereby does not evidence a liberation or dilation of the self, but rather its forcible constraint in consequence of which our lives become something we **have** and **live** only after the fact. From a narrative point of view, the attempt to control others--even when this is 'for their own good'--is always a kind of self-denial, a way of curtailing the emergence of concrete opportunities for challenge-induced improvisation or growth.[11]

To reiterate, if persons are the ceaselessly dynamic interrelation of all of a story's characters and actions into a recursively structured and constantly evolving whole, they cannot be held to be located at or identified with any particular form, place or time. Persons are not located **in** narratives. They are not **a** character, but rather all the characters, all the actions, all the places and events which occur as what we refer to as "the world." Insofar as our karma sets the overall topology of our ongoing experience, there is nothing that we are not responsible for, nothing which we can point to and say--"that is not me."[12] As narration, our distinction of inside and outside is purely dramatic. In actuality, there is **no** outside, and the only complete answer to the question "who am I?" does not entail our being opposed to or separated from others, but is simply everything that has and is coming about.[13]

If we accept such a view of personhood, it follows that there are no basic social units according to which we can define (or set limits to) sociality. Indeed, since it is impossible for us to stand outside of our narration and fully objectify it or its 'contents,' it is not altogether clear in what sense it is legitimate to even ask what sociality **is**. If we are asking, "What sort of a thing is sociality? what objective state of affairs does it correspond to?," we are committing the very error Bourdieu warned against--identifying ourselves as a narrator objectively studying/describing the social sphere, we project into it the principles of our (wholly artificial) relationship to it. If we refrain from removing ourselves to the position of outside-standers, it would seem that sociality cannot be defined in terms of its being "this" or "that" since it ceases to be a destination we arrive at and achieve closure with respect to in the course of our inquiry. More properly, sociality is a concrete mode of our narration, a direction that we take as persons, as irreducibly karmic and hence dramatic worlds. The social is not, in actuality, a sphere or domain, but an orientation.

What is actually given are not others arrayed about a real and central self, but--if anything--interpersonality, the interpenetration and continual re-orienting of narratives which (being recursively articulated) are incomplete and thus not purely or intrinsically subjective, and which (because they emerge only between the twin horizons of birth and death) we can never stand outside of in order to wholly objectify as 'things' (*dharmas*).[14] In other words, what is given is the normally excluded and inherently dynamic middle between the individual and collective--what I have been referring to as **conduct** or the movement of our narration as a whole.[15]

In the sense just defined, sociality should not be seen as a particular form of behavior--that is, as some**thing** done by some**one**--but as an orientation of conduct, a way in which 'worlds' (narratives or persons) evolve. For our present purposes, it is useful to

see conduct--that is, narrative movement--as polarized along two relatively distinct dimensions which I will refer to as the social and the societal.

In brief, sociality entails an orientation of conduct toward establishing, maintaining or undermining jointly improvised narratives. Underlying such an orientation is the sense that relating with others is literally an incorporation of them, a communicative process of creative integration.[16] By contrast, a societal orientation is geared toward establishing, maintaining or undermining universally adhered to structures of regulated behavior. Here, relations with others are taken to be external in nature and ideally productive of lasting agreement.

Whereas sociality consists of being open to the challenges of other narratives and involves a commitment to responding to those challenges in a spontaneous--that is, non-habitual--fashion, societality consists of the attempt to forestall such challenges and to appeal to regular and essentially reactive forms of behavior, the efficacy of which is a function of their ideal independence from the unique concerns of any given person's life-story. Thus, the societal is concerned with enduring institutions in the context of which both our selves and others are seen as abstract or generic individuals. Insofar as the political institutions of the United States are concerned, we are each citizens not because I am Peter and you are Kathy, but because--like some 200 million other citizens--we were born in one of the fifty states. Our relations with others are thus external in the sense that who we are is not a direct function of the presence or absence of particular persons with complete and unique life histories, but rather of wholly interchangeable others. What is paramount is not the persons we encounter, but how people are placed with respect to us in the institutions guiding our behavior.

In this sense, the societal has much in common with both Bourdieu's habitus and Durkheim's collective, being an orientation toward customs or traditions which disregard

the uniqueness of each of us as persons and tend to bring about an awareness of our being "a people".[17] Insofar as the social is concerned with direct and unrepeatable encounters with other persons as irreplaceable characters in open-ended improvisation, it tends to eventuate a transgression of all pre-determined roles and to encourage a steady irruption of the unexpected.[18]

Recalling that we defined suffering above as the unexpected interruption of a given narrative, it follows that sociality involves an open-ness to suffering or the cultivation of vulnerability.[19] However, since the concrete form of this open-ness is an orientation toward improvised conduct, sociality includes within itself the means of ending suffering, of creatively integrating the disruption into the ongoing flow of our narration. Insofar as the social and societal have both been defined in terms of orientations toward establishing, maintaining or undermining various forms of conduct, it is clear that sociality alone is no guarantee of the ending of any given crisis or incidence of suffering. Conducting oneself socially can, that is, as well undermine as cultivate improvised responses to others, and to the extent that this is the case it should be seen as performing a regulative function, of acting as a brake on uncontrolled innovation. If such conduct is persisted in, our overall orientation undergoes a kind of inversion, swinging around to a more and more markedly societal heading, and we find ourselves bringing about increasingly habitual forms of conduct, viewing both self and other in an increasingly universal or generic light. Eventually, we will exit the interpersonal as such and leave ourselves closed to challenge. Where this closure is particularly strong, as in catatonics and certain forms of paranoid or schizophrenic encapsulization, there is neither the possibility of new crises arising nor the means for resolving those already embodied in the world of our narrative. Thus, while societality tends to decrease the likelihood of suffering by decreasing our vulnerability, it at the same time decreases our ability to

resolve crises or end suffering by encouraging increased inflexibility, by fostering the preservation of dispositions and material conditions which we have found to be productive of equilibrium.[20,21]

To summarize, societality marks an orientation toward the regulated agreement or co-existence of our self and others, while sociality marks an orientation toward the improvised interpenetration or integration of persons or life-narratives. In more concrete terms, what this means is that in the societal, others are experienced largely if not entirely through the roles they play--admittedly with greater or lesser aplomb. The typical office party is in this sense predominantly a societal and not a social gathering. In fact, our interactions with grocery clerks, bank tellers, lawyers, doctors, teachers and (sadly enough) even our friends and family are often entirely mediate or societal in nature. When roles are dropped or (as is more often the case) shattered, we generally experience others in an entirely novel light. They come alive, have unanticipated histories, dreams, interests or depths which can either entrance or threaten us, but which cannot leave us unmoved, unchanged. Even when societality is aimed at undermining a given society's institutions--as, for example, in a Marxist revolution, a feminist rejection of patriarchal practices, or an adolescent's ubiquitous attempt to challenge authority--others are seen as **people**, not as persons in the full narrative sense. Others are capitalists or workers, women or men, teenagers or adults, us or them. Our path and theirs may run parallel or intersect--often violently--but they are never the same.

The contrary is true of sociality. In that the social implies a radical open-ness to others as "co-authors" of our story, of ourselves as persons, our path and theirs are related internally in the sense that we are characters in a shared narration. In its most intensely realized form, this involves the recognition that 'you' and 'I' are in actuality aspects or expressions of the same person.[22]

In any typical span of time our conduct can be seen as either shifting from the societal to the social and back again--often with such speed and fluidity that we are unaware of the re-orientations until long after the fact--or as an ultimately amorphous alloy of the two. Because of this, we are in a very real sense often living in more than a single world. But since establishing or maintaining sociality requires more of us, more attention and energy, we as often as not tend to dwell in the societal, relying on habitual and hence efficient forms of behavior and resting content with institutionally defined relations with others. Resisting this, we at least initially experience an increase of uncertainty, an instability resulting from the stream of our narration flowing into and being entered by that of another. In this confluence, a great increase of energy manifests. What had seemed impossible or unimaginable no longer is so. What seemed fixed and settled dissolves. To extend the metaphor, the stream emerging from this confluence may be much wider or cut a much deeper channel than its predecessors. It may throw itself over previously unseen precipices or wend an entirely new path across familiar terrain. Either way, we are profoundly and irreversibly transformed.

CHAPTER 4

THE 'ONTOLOGY' OF LIBERATION: NARRATION AND THE PROBLEM WITH CAUSALITY

We are now at a point where it is possible to see in a preliminary fashion what it means to say that Ch'an enlightenment is fundamentally social. Very briefly, an enlightenment which is social cannot be reduced to a privately realized state of consciousness, but should be seen as a qualitatively unique way of conducting ourselves in the narrative space of interpersonality. Insofar as sociality is an orientation of conduct toward the improvised interpenetration or integration of previously disparate life-narratives, the arising or awakening of Ch'an enlightenment can be seen as the result of systematically relinquishing those horizons by means of which we identify and differentiate ourselves from others: the always ongoing realization of harmony with others.[1]

Fleshing out this preliminary understanding of the sociality of enlightenment will be a two part process. First, it will be necessary to specify the manner in which this integration of narratives takes place--in effect, to articulate the essentials of a consistently Buddhist theory of communication. Secondly, we shall have to develop an account of how our horizons are actually, and not merely conceptually, relinquished--that is, we shall have to articulate what is meant by "practice" in the Ch'an context. Such will be the focuses of chapters five and six and seven through ten, respectively.

Our present task is much more fundamental. It has perhaps been noticed that as often as stylistic considerations have permitted, I have used the locution "[this] **should be seen as** [that]" in place of the more usual "[this] **is** [that]". Far from being a purely literary affectation, this avoidance of the copula has been meant to represent as nearly as possible

in a propositional context what I take to be a singularly radical inversion--initiated by the Buddha and coming to full fruition in Ch'an--of the usual priority of the ontic over the axial. With this inversion, the familiar query "what is [this]?" ceases to be finally answerable in terms of either substances, forms or essences since, instead of assuming that being (or, for that matter, becoming) is the basic ontological category, the root of all things *(dharmas)* is seen as orientation or value.

Insofar as the preceding account of suffering, personality and sociality was articulated in consonance with the principle of this inversion--that is, with the denial of any ultimate "reality" to both subject and object--it would not be surprising if an ontically-biased reader felt as if the discussion left him or her in a kind of metaphysical limbo, vexed by a ghostly whirl of unanswered questions. For instance, what is narration? Are we to take seeing persons as narration in some literal sense, or is it merely a useful metaphor? Can it be consistently maintained that persons are not natural events, and that they can merge in such a way that they are the same without being either identical or different? If "I" am not the teller of my story, why can I sometimes do as I intend? If the world is not real, why does it resist me in my projects? Finally, what--if anything--remains if both the objective and subjective poles of existence are denied ultimate reality?

One of the implications of the Buddhist inversion of being and value is that what will count as answers to these questions is a function of the underlying ontology against which they are framed. That is, what will count as an explanation, as knowledge and as meaning cannot be divorced from the (typically unacknowledged) ontological assumptions we make prior to phrasing and posing our questions--assumptions which themselves amount to specific orientations toward both ourselves and our world(s). Thus, while it is not possible to mount here a full-scale exposition of Buddhist 'ontology', it is indispensable that we at least lay to rest those metaphysical and ontological ghosts which

particularly threaten to occlude the possibility of accepting the conclusions toward which the following chapters will move us. The first of these is the lingering assumption that a person and hence narration must--at some level, whether intrinsically or by reduction--be an objective and determinately located phenomenon or thing[2]; the second is the assumption that causal efficacy necessarily implies a real world (or worlds) of distinct things or beings--a world congruent with the logic of identity and difference--and that all changes are brought about or initiated by the influence of one thing on others, even the transformation of a sentient being into a buddha.

Very briefly, I will contend that far from being definable within the framework of a deterministic ontology[3], narration should be seen as a radically alternative ontological path, as a **mode**--and not an object--**of envaluation**. Granted this, if a person is to be seen as narration--that is, as an entire and ultimately autopoietic world and not merely as a relatively independent component of or in a world--and if our narration is not fundamentally a thing, but a lived-value (a shared orientation) which we cannot get outside of to view objectively, it would seem impossible to maintain the prevailing view of causality as an irreducibly external relation. Once the bias toward conscious experience implied in the centrist construction of personality in terms of the ego-alteri dichotomy is nullified, we will have lost the primary metaphor (the self as agent) on the basis of which we are inclined to construe causation as influence, as a linear transfer of force.[4] If we do not commit the centrist fallacy of identifying ourselves as the narrator or the intending ego, but realize that we are inseparable from everything happening in our world, things cease to be seen as caused by what has preceded them, and are seen instead as reciprocally and internally related. To use the Buddhist term, all things are seen as dependently arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*). While we may effectively cut a niche of apparent control out of the world through the rigid projection of horizons for relevance, it

is not 'you' or 'I' that tells our story, but rather the story itself. There are no outside-standers. As is entailed by taking the Buddhist doctrine of karma in full earnest, persons are best seen as worlds in the process of (recursively) articulating themselves. Admitting this, the relationship between practice and the attainment of enlightenment or between the mergence of life-narratives and the realization of our sameness with others are necessarily seen very differently than where causation presumes fixed identities or entities and strict temporal determinacy. No less than is the case with narratives, causes will be seen as essentially axial, not ontic.

Both Hindu and Western metaphysics and ontology have traditionally admitted the possibility of two self-consistent ways of conceiving the nature of reality. In both, reality is taken to be objective--that is, it is defined as a kind of thing, or as the totality of all things. Typically, things are defined in terms of either material or ideal entities. In some systems, these are both admitted (dualisms of one sort or another), while in others, one of them is reduced to the other (monisms which are either materialist or idealist). I will argue that Buddhism is neither a dualist nor monist tradition, that in fact it eschews any assertion of what is or is-not, remaining thereby a perspective intrinsic to the on-going narration which is the world. Reality is then seen in operational, not objective terms: as something which is done, rather than discovered.

A. The Prejudices of Inquiry.

1. Calculation and Narration: The World-Constituting Modes of Envaluation.

Causality is often associated with notions of regularity, constant conjunction, efficacy, agency, force, necessity and so on. But these are not pre-given elements of conversation which are fortuitously present when we begin theorizing about causation. Rather, they are answers to a question, variously approached and hence affording strikingly different responses or resolutions: "Why/how are things coming to be the way

they are?" In what follows, I shall propose that there are two primary approaches to asking and responding to this question--the narrative and the calculative--and that a prejudice for the latter orientation has not only dominated much of the Indian and European philosophical traditions, but has led to an unwholesome obsession with certainty and control that is deeply at odds with the spontaneous creativity which both depends on and gives rise to true sociality.[5]

Before addressing the calculation-narration distinction directly, it is instructive to note that while contemporary discussions of causation typically accord Aristotle's four-dimensional model an originating status, it is Hume's analysis which is considered pivotal and no treatment of the matter of causation is deemed comprehensive which does not take his objections to the classical model fully into account. Yet it is obvious that Hume did not answer the question posed above, but rather denied it by saying that what we call causality is only a perceived regularity of experiences, a customary following of one event or thing by another. The oft-cited Humean difficulty with necessity is crucial because founded on just this refusal to take the question to heart. For Hume, causation is a **perceptual habit**, not a kind of hidden, internal connection. All that we have direct access to are contiguous, atomic moments, some of which regularly follow others. Now, it might be thought that a deist or even a god-dependent rationalist like Descartes would be diametrically opposed to Hume on this. But a deist who insists that everything is precisely as it must be as a function of divine will does so at the very same cost of denying anything we would be inclined to call causality between events since, on his account, there are nothing but effects in this world, the world of experience. Thus, there is no empirically-based explanation which will account for why **this event** seems always to follow **that one** because **neither is a cause**. This is Hume in religious garb.

If we accept as phenomenologically accurate the claim that the constitution of the temporal, and hence of the sequential, is related to the limit of the senses insofar as this limit provides the boundary conditions within which simultaneity or 'the now' becomes a theme for consciousness, then under both the Humean and the deist accounts, causes are outside of time--outside of the present, the limit of the senses--if they exist at all. And yet, it is inarguable that the notion of causality first appeared in an historical consciousness, a consciousness not confined to a point-like or autonomous present. This is often glossed over in theories of causation. The cause-effect relation is conveniently contracted to presence within a single instant and hence idealized and removed from anything like lived history. In other words, causation is said to occur at some **point** in time. Neither Hume nor the deist, then, can answer to what we as historical beings actually experience as causality--the complex interweaving of past, present and future into an indeterminately large whole--and it is no wonder that their disquisitions on the matter so often lead to pitting free will and determinism against one another. For them, causal determination is necessarily something that happens **to** us or that we exercise **over** others since it is presumed that cause and effect are irreducibly different, separate.

No doubt this presumption is rooted in the (centrist) experience we have of being separate from the world and everything in it, of being sometimes successful and sometimes frustrated actors who see our plans either unfolding as designed or helplessly unraveling only with the march of time. Asked why something occurs in our life or the public life surrounding us, if the just previous instant seems insufficient to account for the present, we typically follow Hume in either his agnostic or deist garb and simply refer back instant by instant in linear sequence until our interlocutor cries "Uncle!" or yawns his concession that we have made our point. Whether this linear sequence is open (a vector) or closed (a circle) makes no real difference. Time and hence history--both our

own and that of the world--are generically conceived as a string of present instants, revealed one at a time, and not as a network or field.[6]

This way of approaching the matter of causation is a paradigm case of what I shall refer to as a calculative mode of inquiry. In calculating, we serialize or parse the fabric of experience, identifying what we take to be the salient direction of change or movement and then breaking up what lies along this line into a sequence of elements or events. In calculating why things happen as they do, we customarily decide that "A led to B which led to C and in turn to D". Events, no less than objects, are parceled into units. Experience is digitalized.

This function of calculating is wonderfully illustrated in the original Latin root--*calcus*--which means "pebble" and refers specifically to the stones used to stand for items being counted. Calculation depends, that is, on abstracting--both in the sense of removing an event or entity from the continuum of experience and in that of moving away from unique perceptions to a scheme of universals (classes) and particulars (instances). Both senses are crucial. It is the former that allows Hume and those of like mind to propose a regularity model of causation since causes are abstracted from effects, and both are seen objectively as "things" situated in a world with which they must in some sense be discontinuous. This process of abstraction is so thoroughly a part of modern consciousness that we do not so much as raise an eyebrow at the typical assertion that no explanation of causation--causes being viewed as conditions, for example--can be considered plausible which erases the fast distinction of cause and effect. That is, any plausible account of causality is required to **take as axiomatic** the separateness of past and present, of the causal object/event and its result. As we shall see, this axiom is not only theoretically suspect--being consistently denied within the context of Buddhist

ontology--but without solid empirical grounding. Hume's testimony to contrary, we never actually experience separate and yet contiguous events.

It is, however, the latter sense of abstraction that establishes the possibility of modeling causation. One of the commonly acknowledged problems with regularity models is their need to invoke an apriori notion of reason-able (accountable) connection prior to showing how such connections are *only* contiguities. In other words, we must already have a universal notion of connection as well as of things that are connected in order to see two 'events' as 'merely contiguous'. Thus, calculating with stones required first and foremost a readiness and ability to represent--to have a generic object **stand for** a variety of unique things.

Whenever we decide to have one thing stand for another, we have not only performed an act of abstraction, but one of reduction as well. In effect, we reduce the fullness of what opens up before and within us to that which is currently relevant, and by doing so develop the complementary concepts of class and member. Strictly speaking, cause and effect are classes which are never actually experienced. Seen through such classifying lenses, an indefinitely rich and symphonic fabric of timely awareness is split up into separate events or entities which are in turn identified according to a simplifying calculus of their relative functions.

The bias toward reduction within any calculative inquiry into why-things-have-come-to-be-as-they-are can be witnessed in full operation within the history of the scientific community in the last half millennium. Here, where causal explanations have reigned supreme and unequivocal mathematical symbols and grammars have largely replaced the polysemous language of daily intercourse, the earth and its waters, the moon and stars, the sun and the plants it nourishes, even life itself and our consciousness of it have all been inexorably reduced to some singularly most salient abstraction. In effect,

we have come to see unique occurrences as merely particular events conforming to universal--that is, experientially vacuous--laws. Importantly, this reduction is justified by virtue of its being instrumental in acquiring increased control and predictive accuracy. That is, in calculative reduction we undertake the elimination of the allegedly irrelevant in order to *manage experience*, to make it liable to manipulation by sweeping complex webs of unique interrelation into a homogenous mass easily grasped and disposed.[7]

There are two results of this simplification. First, there is an unavoidable loss of contact with the connective, liminal subtleties of hue and texture--a tendency to see things as having a location rather than a place, as happening (from the root *happ*, luck, chance, a discrete event) rather than as occurring (from the roots *ob+currere*, a running towards, a flowing). Secondly, there soon develops a preoccupation with the past, with antecedents, since no truly simple abstraction can be undertaken of the place toward which things are now flowing. It is only in the past that we can actually find located things. The future is the place of indeterminacy and of little use in a calculation since we are incapable of discerning what is truly relevant. The requisite relation of standing-for is difficult to establish regarding things which have not yet occurred and so we tend to look backward to find out what something **is**. Notably, while Aristotle allowed for the possibility that the future has a role in causation, as the calculative mind became more and more entrenched in our cultural milieu this became simply unthinkable. The cause of what is happening is to be found, if at all, only in the past.

It should be stressed that there is really no empirical evidence for this universal claim. While many events seem to be satisfactorily accounted for by reference only to prior states of the world, it must be admitted that what counts as satisfactory is a function of what counts as relevant and that is precisely what is being questioned here--the pre-emptive decision or cutting off of **what is** relevant from **what is not**. From a narrative

perspective, for instance, it is often felt that an accident occurs in order for us to meet someone who subsequently and significantly contributes to our life. The sense we have is that we were led to experience the accident by our eventual meeting with this person. The crucial difference between events which are satisfactorily accounted for using a uni-directional and not a multi-directional view of causality may well be that between events which are not seen as inherently meaningful--especially in the sense to be discussed later in this and the following chapter--and those which are. That rubbing sticks together causes a fire may be true, but why we rub the sticks together is another matter altogether. If the why is found in our present or prior intention, the fire itself can only with great difficulty be seen as bringing us to rub sticks together. If, however, why something happens may be found in an occurrence, there is no reason to insist that this occurrence must be one which is past. As long as meaning is associated with intention, the past will continue to apparently cause the present and future. But if this presumption is dropped, as is entailed by ceasing to commit the centrist fallacy, then that conclusion no longer necessarily follows.

By now it should be evident that calculative representation or "standing-for" requires the inquirer or calculator to adopt a certain stance toward the investigated. To see horses as represented, as describable or countable, is not to ride or feed or lather or hitch them to a carriage. To describe eggs is not to eat them, hatch them or market them, nor is it a qualitatively equivalent manner of relating to them. Representing involves at the very least a standing apart from what is identified for representation--the interposition of whatever we are using to stand-for the represented--even if the latter is our own 'self'. This is a deceptively 'natural' move for us from entering an active and mutual relationship **with** things to treating them **as** things, as objects of ourselves as subjects; a move which has undeniably practical benefits, not the least of which is the capacity for treating things

in mass according to some selected relationship we have with them. An example of this would be our dealings with cattle raised for slaughter in the beef industry. But there is a clear downside as well--the tendency to lose respect for 'things' because a thing represented is not the focus of an entire world and hence fully integral to who **we** are, but a single and ultimately insignificant instance.

As a carpenter, my hammer is unique and irreplaceable, something irreducible to a set of purely generic qualities. For the hardware clerk taking inventory, however, hammers are things located on a particular aisle distinguished from others only in that it now houses all the hammers, although last year it housed PVC pipe. Unlike my hammer which rests in a toolbox, a kind of home it shares with screwdrivers, awls, chalk-lines and so on, the clerk's hammers are all lumped together and then distinguished by manufacturer--by the location from which they have been shipped--and by their function. Any unique aspects--whether of hammers, sharks or human beings--are obliterated in a calculation of the members of a class. There appears instead a singular concern with the priority of a thing as fixed in its lineage. Attendant to this is the development of explanations which are themselves linear, of the conception of (*merely* metaphorical?) causal chains. The unique becomes thereby a moment only, an accidental instance or particular which is essentially contingent and by definition unexplained except as subsumed under or as an aberration of the norm or ideal. Once we have so objectified the abstracted elements of experience, we adopt the attitude of one whose job it is not to participate in and grow old with, but merely to use and describe. To realize that one thing can stand for another is inevitably to stand apart from both.

In fact, calculation refers to that mode of awareness or world-constitution which promotes discourse--the flowing-apart into discrete things of what from a Buddhist perspective is understood as wholly ambiguous, as absent of any abiding form or fixed

and defining characteristics. Calculation marks the path of discrimination, a mode of envaluation which projects discrete and fundamentally interchangeable objects even as it introjects equally discrete perceiving and thinking subjects. That is, it provides the transformative context within which a world can be reduced to a collection of various types of individuals, opening up thereby the potential for societality. As such, calculation is the matrix out of which 'selves' are brought into existence--that is, into standing out or apart from (*ex+sistere*)--and with them the possibility of having and not-having, of asserting is and is-not.

By contrast, narration does not evidence digitalization and reduction but the intensification of relation or analogy. Since analogy is by nature horizonal, a widening of aperture, unlike calculative inquiry which emphasizes linearity and proceeds by way of the distillation of simples from experience--reducing relation to what lies between separate entities or processes and making these latter equivalents within a more or less well specified scheme of usage--narration weaves the initially disparate into complex wholes without sacrificing their uniqueness. The shift of orientation suggested here indicates that while the direction of the calculative vector is originally fragmentive and yet eventually monistic due to its hierarchically structured tendency toward abstractive reduction, narration is assimilative and holistic. And so, whereas narration encourages perceiving/developing relations of mutual dependence among the initially ambiguous 'elements' of lived experience, calculation precipitates the separation of independencies and, following their reduction via the operation of abstraction, the subsuming of these newly constituted 'things' under successively more and more general or universal categories. In a word, narration can be understood as that mode of awareness or world-realization which is unremittingly conducive to concourse or flowing-together. Instead of

manipulation or making, narration is best seen as the context of true appreciation, of contributory accordance-with rather than acquisatory use-of.

Now, because calculation eventuates the distillation of universals and because this allows generalization to proceed without hindrance, it fosters the identification of necessary relationships and hence of an association of order and regularity. By contrast, narration involves the preservation and enjoyment of uniqueness even as it intensifies relationality and so is conducive to dramatic order. Thus, while a calculatively biased world is riven by the antipathy of necessity and chance, a narratively elicited world celebrates the unexpected, seeing it as the birth condition of an order conceived in terms of creative growth and not comprehensive stasis.

Narratives must build with and in time as the realization of ever more extensive webs of relation just as calculations must end in time if they are not infinitely regressive and hence irrational. Ideally, an array of data is fed into a calculus and out comes **an** answer, **the** answer, something that agrees with the facts, is their functional equivalent. Narration pulls in the apparently disparate and spins out something at once deeper and broader than had previously revealed itself. Whereas the calculative explicates or produces, narration implicates or enfolds, and so it is no surprise that calculations ideally leave us out of the picture altogether (i.e. are 'objective') and that narratives involve speaker and listener as co-creators of the history being enacted over a coursing of time. If we understand the best stories we tell as being analogues of narration as such, it is no surprise that we empathize or identify with the characters and occurrences in a story. In a very real sense, we are drawn into understanding that our presence is irreducibly a given-togetherness. No such empathetic identification occurs with respect to the elements of calculation unless, as in quantum mechanics, our calculations are obviously incomplete without some reference to our role in calculating.

The moral significance of this and its importance for understanding the sociality of Ch'an enlightenment is that while we feel drawn out by narration even as we are drawn into it, sensing an actual responsibility in its development, explaining events calculatively signals our independence of them. Thus, under the force of calculation freedom comes to be opposed to and not a species of responsiveness and responsibility. And so to say of someone that he or she is calculating is to impugn their character because we feel that they exclude us as objects managed in a stream of experience to which we have no immediate access. Moreover, it is this sense of being independent in calculation that leads us to feel that, insofar as we are influenced by events around us, we are losing our freedom, being determined. Having been cut off from truly intimate community with the world, what happens seems manifestly to be not always our own doing. Where it is not, we feel overcome. In short, the antipathy of freedom and determinism can only happen in the generic space of calculation. Only there does freedom connote power or the ability to regulate and not simply appreciating--enhancing or adding value through a responding-with that opens ever wider fields of contribution. As we shall see, it is the latter that best articulates what it means to live and not merely think about or hope for the bodhisattva life.

Myths, legends and fairy tales provide perhaps the least problematic models for understanding narration in the sense used here--as a world modality and not as the creation or doing of some identifiable agent. Unlike modern novels and short stories and (to a lesser extent perhaps) the dramas of ancient Greece, as parts of an originally oral tradition, myths, legends and fairy tales are in a very important sense **unauthored** even though each telling of them is quite unique. That is, they are best seen as the articulation of unique cultural orientations and not primarily as representative--the former (articulation) implying a process of growth which occurs throughout the social body and

the latter (representation) an imposition of order by some outside-stander. Thus, in myths and other traditional narratives, ordination and hierarchy are not absolute. Indeed inversions are common themes--princes becoming paupers, the slave attaining freedom and equality, the hero or heroine overcoming superior adversaries through some apparently insignificant detail which they alone have deemed relevant to the task at hand. Indeed, the heroic persona can be seen as precisely that type which is not wont to exclude anything as **irrelevant in principle** and which is willing to attempt the apparently impossible because success is understood to nearly always originate not in certitude and security, but open-endedness and the unexpected. In such narratives, the end may be the beginning, the beginning the end. But as Godel pointed out, such a self-reference on the calculative dimension necessarily involves the system in incompleteness--not the openness of narrative possibility, but a disturbing ungroundedness. A complete calculation must **represent**, must refer to a (simplified) world of (relatively) autonomous abstractions. When calculation is forced into the world it describes or explains, as in the instance of quantum mechanical experiment, the result is irreducible uncertainty and the specter of a-causality, of the non-universality of causation.

On calculation's behalf, it may be remarked that it leads to inflexibility because once it is done, it is always done. We may have made an error in calculation, but ideally our solution is eternally valid and universally applicable. But as will be considered in greater detail later, this 'stability' may in fact amount to rigidity, especially when the results of a calculation (meaning, as throughout our discussion, a calculating inquiry or determination of what has come-to-be) are then taken as correct and not simply corrective. By contrast, narration naturally promotes flexibility or 'instability' because something is always occurring.[8] All is never told. Stories are admittedly selections, a function of choice. The ontological implications of all this are that calculation depends on

'what is' being viewed atomistically, be the atoms material, logical or even temporal, whereas narration tends toward viewing 'what is' as the focusing of an ambiguous field depending on one's perspective and criteria for relevance. 'What is' must therefore never be considered as absolute, but as irreducibly provisional and projective in nature.

Thus, while the highest form of praise for a calculation is to assert that it has left nothing out of account, in narration there is an explicit understanding that we **adopt** limits to inquiry--that limits to relevance are always chosen, and never imposed on us by an independent world. A narrative ontology, then, cannot be realist in either the naive sense or in its strong philosophical one. But, as a brief excursus into the Mahayana Buddhist Perfection of Wisdom literature will soon indicate, such a model need not be idealist, and on grounds similar to those underlying its non-realism. However, whereas the critique of realism is essentially ontological, that of idealism is necessarily epistemological--the realization that truth is social, not logical, and that communication is not the transfer of information, but co-ordination--the setting of like priorities and hence values in conduct.

2: Ontological Ambiguity and the Toxic Potential of Conception.

According to the narrative mode of inquiry, not only is a son inconceivable without a family, a stone is inconceivable without a place, an earth, a sun for it to orbit, a galaxy through which it spirals. It is a convenience that we abstract 'son' from family and 'rock' from Earth. Yet, so thoroughly calculative are the presuppositions of our age that we find it quite natural to object: most fundamentally, we are individuals and only incidentally are we sons or daughters, tradespersons or professionals, adults or children. We can change names, jobs and familial relationships through both chance and choice. But isn't this attitude, this presumption of the primacy of individuality, already an indication of abstraction? Removing all of our "accidental" qualities of body type, family

ties, work, dispositional quirks and so on, what remains of our "person" but that which may be found in any schoolchild's dictionary?[9]

Structurally, the same problems occur in discussions of causes as in those of sons and stones. "Cause," like "individual" or "stone," is a class concept. It cannot produce 'real-world' effects, effects in our lived experience, any more than an "individual" can be married or bear children. Only a person with a name, parents, a native land, an education, a unique set of learning experiences and so on can marry and procreate. And yet matters are no better in respect of "inanimate" objects like rocks since it is plain that we can no more build a home out of "rocks" than an "individual" can produce offspring. Indeed, we cannot build even with a specific type of stone like the moss rock gathered out near Kaena Point. We can build only with these unaccountably unique stones present for us in our lives, available to our callused hands and our sweat and love-burnished tools. To build with rocks, they must in quite an intimate way be parts of our life, our living.

In fact, we may quite defensibly say that there are no such things as 'individuals' or 'persons'. We only call them that. Indeed, there are no such things as 'rocks' or 'trees' or 'stars' or the 'beginning of the universe'. We only refer to them as such. This is not the equivalent of saying that nothing exists, that there is nothing to perceive, or that "rocks" and "trees" are merely words--in the now famous phrase: maps and not the terrain. My point is much closer to what I take the Diamond Sutra to be driving at in its formally identical disclaimers about the status of 'beings', 'Buddhas', 'truths' and indeed all 'things' (*dharmas*). It is not simply that our words are merely references and not what is referred to, and that we therefore cannot presume to know what truly is by simply hearing or speaking about it. More profoundly, what is being gotten at is a three part relation among beings, values and designations. That is, part of the meaning of the Diamond Sutra is a move toward perceiving that no present dharma is a 'dharma,' we only designate it

"dharma." Here, dharma refers to the irreducible ambiguity presencing in our life-narrative and which we are addressing via our inquiry; 'dharma' is what we constitute via our setting limits to relevance and inquiry; and "dharma" is the particular linguistic designation we associate with our projected value or 'dharma.' That is to say, [this] should not be seen as what we value, what we consider relevant--'[this]'; rather, it is only designated as "[this]". Our utterances--"[this]"--do not, therefore, refer to what precedes thinking--[this], but to our projections of value horizons--'[this]'.[10]

If '[this]' were absolute or fixed, then we would really have no insurmountable problems in establishing a secure foundation for knowledge. Indeed, it would be just as good as if '[this]' really were [this]. So much Kant saw. However, since '[this]' is horizonal and arises as a function of changing subjective and objective conditions in an always unique history, "[this]" has no determinate or necessary reference. Given the relative longevity of our cultural and societal institutions it is no doubt easy to forget that this is so and to presume in consequence that our words refer to something that 'really is' and not to horizons we have projected for relevance--whether as individuals or cultures. Indeed, it is just such a presumption that underlies the bitter contention and physical violence that has been justified as the so-called pursuit of truth. To then assess [this] in terms of how we use "[this]"--the program of analytic philosophy--is not even to approach what we have en-valuatively discriminated since it is not in any way absolute, but only habitually and hence contingently fixed. In short, it is to mistake predication--a contextually valid projection of values--for an ontologically justified determination.

Moreover, regardless of the unfortunate consequences of writing in a linearly organized, proposition-based language, it should not be supposed on the basis of the above that some **determinate** [this] **exists** prior to our projection of '[this]'. '[This]' is a decision, the result of cutting into the indefinite richness of the fabric of our narration and

excising a relevant set of universally construed qualities which we will come to refer to as "[this]". Whatever is 'prior' to thinking and our projections of value has no name, no location, no worth or lack of it. It is not one or many, material or ideal. We have been content with saying it is ambiguous, but even this may still (and untruthfully) imply some substance or thing which has the characteristic of being indeterminate.

Thus, all individuals, rocks and beginnings are perhaps best viewed as distillations of lived experience, distillations on which we may become intoxicated if proper caution is not paid to their effect on us. And the more abstract and ideal, the more concentrated the spirit we distill, the more likely we are to lose contact with the world of mutuality, the world in which reality connotes not some special quality or substance or transcendental well-spring, but simply living in such a fashion that when crises arise--challenges to us physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually--that we are able to do something corrective about it. In reality so defined, truth is not a standard (logical) or an ideal (conceptual) or a mirror of nature. Truth ceases to be what is correct, but is instead correcting; just as reality has ceased to be objective and instead is taken as neither subject nor object but as a relation in which the two dissolve in creatively apt conduct.

In should be pointed out, lest the above be misconstrued, that the toxicity of concepts is not a reason to reject them out of hand, any more than the toxic effect of drinking alcohol in excess is reason to never taste wine. Indeed, the relation of concepts and human being is much more symbiotic than that we enjoy with alcohol or any other substances of abuse. Instead, it is rather more like the relation we have with oxygen. Everyone knows that oxygen is necessary for our bodily survival. We can live for weeks without solid food, for days without drinking or having sense impressions. But we cannot survive without oxygen for more than a matter of minutes. Just so, we need concepts. Without them, we would wander in complete amazement, bereft of intention but filled

with an open-mouthed appreciation of a peculiar, non-directional sort. Those who have lived through a profound psychedelic experience often remark on the shock of losing their common stock of concepts about the world and how they could in result stare at dirt for hours without either boredom or anxiety, simply attending to ever more subtle details and fluencies of connection to other parts of experience. Without concepts, we should in all likelihood simply absorb what comes our way without discrimination of 'use', 'non-use', 'harmful' or 'helpful'. To search for--much less to grow or store--food would be impossible without a notion of what counts as food or nourishment. On this view, concepts are not a peculiarly human possession, but can be legitimately attributed to all organisms, perhaps to all self-organizing systems.

Nevertheless, too much conceptualization is just as harmful and dysfunctional as hyperventilating. At first, the excess makes us giddy. Later, we become anxious and think that perhaps the whole world is inhospitable and out of control. Finally, we begin to lose contact with reality altogether. We cease to be able to cope. Just as the oxygen or alcohol-intoxicated person may behave in starkly inappropriate fashions, so the concept-drunken person is liable to commit the most unconscionable atrocities in the name of such highly refined abstractions as God, Truth, and Country. Such bizarre behavior never results from use of the relatively tame concepts we use in daily discourse--'rock', 'tree', 'sleep', and 'sex' --but only from those we take to be of the highest importance and value. In still greater quantities or concentrations, concepts can, like oxygen, function quite literally as poison. In this light, the virtually unremitting invective directed at thinking by the Ch'an tradition and epitomized in the adoption of non-thinking (*wu-nien*) as one of its guiding principles or methods should be seen less as an indictment of thinking or conceptualization altogether than as a criticism of the kind of repetitive, habitual thought

(*nien*: to chant, to intone or recite as well as to think) which signals a liability to conceptual addiction and our subsequent disengagement from truly social endeavor.[11]

Taking Ch'an's cautions to heart, it must be realized that while we have spoken of sons and rocks and trees as if they were less abstract than individuals, they are still abstractions, just as are "diamonds" or even "15 karat South African diamonds mined and exported through the perpetuation of the inhuman institution of apartheid." And granted this, the temptation arises to say that true particulars--unique things--cannot be pluralized. Such a radical immersion in and concern for the non-general, however, is in some sense to deny things their real nature if it entails a tendency to atomize--as in the concentration on phenomenal particulars, for example. Here, we err not by a flight of abstraction leading us to overarching universals, but one which leads us to radical particularity of the sort proclaimed, among others, by empiricists of the early British stamp or the Sarvastivadins of later Indian Buddhism. The logical end of such a move is, it would seem, a perverse monadology in which each phenomenon is radically disjunct from all others and exists as a thing unto itself. The problem then becomes one of explaining the marked regularity of certain connections we observe without either appealing to a universal order behind or above the clamor of experience or, like Hume, suggesting that connectedness is simply a habit of thought. In either of these two cases, the given-togetherness of all things is no longer lived, but merely idealized.

Both varieties of abstraction--toward the universal and toward the particular--are functions quite natural to the calculative intellect, and yet of the two it is perhaps the move toward universals that is more practical since it renders things manageable. The resort to radical particularity--particulars divorced from all others and hence self-existent--renders control or management impossible without an infinitely flexible algorithm since there could be no general methods in a world comprising only fully autonomous

individuals. The unique, however, is compatible with narration and surrounds the universal (class) and particular (instance) as that from which both have been abstracted.

B. What If Causes are Horizons?

The importance of all this for our discussion of causation lies in the recognition that the use of "cause" in the context of a response to the question regarding how things have come to be as they are is predicated on a prior determination of 'what is'. Ontology apparently precedes causality and explanation. But as the foregoing interpretation of the implications of the Diamond Sutra has suggested, ontology is simply axiology made 'objective'. 'What is' should not be seen as ultimately independent of us, but as a projection of values. This may be hidden or forgotten in the calculative mode and accepted as responsibly chosen in the narrative, but in either case, the assertion of 'what is' is nothing other than a setting of limits to inquiry and hence a fixing of horizons for relevance, a truncation of wholeness. In this sense, the cause of being is not being itself, but value.[12]

The difference of this view from currently received opinion may be further drawn out by reference to what G.H. von Wright asserts as unproblematic presuppositions of any discussion of causes. To begin with, the basic ontological categories are "those of a generic state of affairs and of an occasion" (1974:13) which are to be understood in the framework of a logico-atomistic model of the world. By way of clarification, he adds that it must also be assumed that "the number of elementary states is constant and finite and that time is a discrete flow of successive occasions." (1974:17) In short, he believes that no account of causation is possible outside of a frame of reference which is paradigmatically calculative. Richard Taylor fills in the basic picture sketched by von Wright by adding that mere conjuction is not sufficient for claiming causal connection, but only conjuction which is necessary; a necessity gotten at only by "counterfactual

testing". "It is not," he claims, "until we can say what would have happened, had something else happened which did not happen, that we leave the realm of mere constancy of conjunction and find ourselves speaking of a causal connection...."(1966:28). Here, the presumption is that it is possible to run an experiment duplicating exactly the conditions obtaining in our test case and to alter what we hypothesize is the causal (vs accidental) condition involved. If an identical effect is produced, we have not isolated the cause. If that effect is not produced, we have succeeded and can assert the connection to be a necessary one.[13]

To be sure, an important type of (conceptual) connection is gotten at via this procedure. But the question must be raised as to what conclusions we may legitimately draw from it. If the necessity of connection hinges on the determination that an identical or equivalent result will or will not obtain with the removal of the hypothetical cause, it is clear that necessity depends on warranting identity or equivalence. And it should be evident that this warrant can be provided only within fixed and hopefully specified horizons. Part of the process of so warranting is to see the effect (as well as the cause) as an isolated instance, a singularity in space-time--von Wright's generic occasion. But if 'what is' is admitted to be irreducibly historical and not ideal or abstract, then an effect cannot legitimately be seen as inherently limited to or contained within this or that set of temporal and spatial horizons. Once begun, there is no stopping the changes wrought by the advent of a given affair. Causing a friend to stay home will change not just a few hours of his or her life, but **every** particular in his or her future existing. Some general characteristics will remain the same, but only because we are considering life at a sufficient level of abstraction. At the level of unique occurrences, nothing will ever be as it would have been, regardless of how marked is any prevailing, superficial similarity.

Results of counterfactual tests, then, can never be 'equivalent' unless we first commit ourselves to seeing generically.

As von Wright states in his paper "Logic and the Epistemology of the Causal Relation", all manipulative or interventionist models of causation are grounded on the same basic presuppositions:

> Another logical basis for this kind of causation is (the existence of some degree of) logical atomism, i.e. the conceptual and verificational separability of states of affairs between which a causal connection is either asserted or denied. In particular, it must be possible to come to know the occurrence of the alleged cause-factor independently of (coming to know) the occurrence of the alleged effect-factor, and conversely. (1973:109)

But as has been argued, this independence of events or entities from one another is not given or found in, but rather projected onto "the world". Experience may have categories and generic events may be found therein, but this is no proof of their existence as other than sedimented concepts or values. As any serious study of other cultures makes clear, such a proof hardly seems to be forthcoming, and the belief that the way we see things is the only way to see them is patently (if Kantianly) confused.

It is possible, then, to negatively answer the question of whether there are identical effects or results in a sense stronger that the designation of a close similarity we merely refer to as "identical" and which is actually a function of our having severely limited the range of things considered relevant in discriminating 'what is resulting'. Indeed, a fully dynamic model of causation would begin by replacing the notion of '**an** effect'--von Wright's independent factor--with something like 'resulting' in order to emphasize that the notion of a final outcome or destination must be explicitly acknowledged as a simplification of an ongoing transformation which can only be finalized or resolved by an exercise of will.

The same point may be approached by considering the implications of what is perhaps the most common and general definition of a cause construed in calculative fashion: "a particular, specifiable and isolatable event, entity or condition which produces an equally isolatable effect, X, and which is used to explain the occurrence of X". The inclusion of production in the definition is suggestive that causes are historical phenomena, but under the force of calculative inquiry, the temporality of production is ideal, taking place in any single instant of a time which is asserted as a march of discrete moments. To otherwise constitute time would eventuate a blurring of the distinction of cause and effect which most commentators, like von Wright and Taylor, feel is essential to any adequate account of causation. But when time is reduced to seriality, it is legitimate to ask why the cause does not produce its effect at **every** moment since the power to do so clearly is resident in it. Since such a continual replication of effects moment by moment is not evident in general, the notion of productive power fell into disrepute. The **power** to produce was removed from the cause, a process which reached its logical culmination in the Western tradition with Humean constant conjuction and in the East with the promulgation of *Prajñāparamitā* in the Buddhist tradition.

However, where Hume's elimination of power from the concept of cause was allied with an atomization of experience and hence an imputed existence of discrete things which enforced an ideal a-historicism, the Buddhist denial of efficacy was set in the context of the irreducibility and continuity of change as evidenced in the complex notions of karma, dependent origination and emptiness. Since change is constant and since all things are empty--that is, without fixed temporal, spatial or conceptual boundaries--production is properly conceivable only as a directing or deflecting of all presently confluent and mutually dependent and interpenetrating conditions. That is, efficacy is seen as a selection or change in orientation.

The aspect of explanatory, versus productive, force has fared much better. This variety of force obtains in the context of offering an account which satisfies or places an end to inquiry. A cause in this sense functions as a limit to inquiry since it satisfactorily answers one's question. Operationally, then, and in full agreement with the basic character of narration, it is possible to define "cause" as 'a complex relevance-event horizon'. Causes are **not** existents any more than the event horizon set for us by the speed of light is a substantial barrier. **Causes are significations of value horizons**.

Now when Hume remarks that we can properly speak of causes "where if the first object had not been, the second would never have existed", he is appealing to something in addition to mere conjunction, without which the mere following of A by B will not have any explanatory force at all. Warranting such a relation, however, depends on our making use of a notion of equivalence without which the imputation of necessity will be vacuous. Thus, it is crucially important to be able to determine that this particular B is of a piece with the other B's which have followed the occurrence of A, and in the absence of which, such a B never manifests. 'What is' becomes a pivotal concept and thus a well-defined notion of calculateable atoms or terms of experience is needed for Humean causation to be acceptable as carrying explanatory force. But, this breaking up of experiential continuities into related entities, moments, events or what have you is not an unproblematically ontological operation. Rather, if the above line of reasoning is sound, it should be viewed as an axiological decision of world constituents.

C. The Virtue of Knowing and the Opening of Explanation.

In summary of the preceding section, we may say that from a calculative perspective a cause is **uncovered** or **found** in the world and that an inquiry may be non-arbitrarily ended only when it has been determined that nothing relevant remains unaccounted. By contrast, from the narrative perspective, a cause is **chosen** by setting

limits to inquiry and relevance since there can never be a complete accounting and since relevance is itself determined by a projection of value horizons and is never held to be a quality inherent to hypothetical 'things-in-themselves'.

That is to say, in narration the moral (value domain) and the ontic (domain of fact) are not separable. Indeed, in a story, all facts have meanings which are revealed only with the further unfolding of the narrative. Meaning is not pre-determined or related even primarily to what is past, but is rather a tending of things, their ramifying. Narrative facts are context-determined with respect to meaning. What is reportable in linear fashion often communicates very little and it is rather the symphonic effect of massing various voices, unrelated when isolated and viewed as particulars, that finally generates or acts as a catalyst in understanding what is happening. Indeed, it is crucial to narration and for that matter musical structures, whether composed or improvised, that the phrases are parts related to one another in a whole which is evolving in an organic or recursive fashion so that each part is modifying and modified by others, and not in a strict linear series. Given this, it is clear that what we know is what may be fixed by our projected constraints on interdependence.

In calculation, facts and values lie in disparate domains, and the meaning of the facts involved in a situation or decision can never exceed the sum of the calculated parts or variables. In short, one cannot get more out of calculation than is put in, and the quality of one's understanding is a direct function of the quantity of one's data. Indeed, since calculation aims to manage experience by simplification and abstraction, one typically gets much less than is put in. For this reason, it is often heard that when all is said and done vis-à-vis a given matter, "it all comes down to...." What? Usually, a seemingly precise 'this' or 'that'. In the ideal end, there are no real choices to be made since the facts "speak for themselves". And so it is that values are made a sub-species of

the known (epistemes) which is itself a sub-species of the existent (beings). No wonder, then, that moral consciousness, like the creative, is relegated to part time, piecemeal work of questionable importance.

Expectedly, the narrative approach would invert this class structure, but in addition it involves allowing that a certain amount of intermarriage of caste members would be decidedly beneficial. That is, the narrative relation of values, epistemes, and beings is not a tree-like hierarchy with values as central, fundamental and held apart from the others as their controller; no more so, at least, than brains are the central controlling organs in animals. The notion that they **are** such is as dated as the notion that we can effectively control--whether a person, a population or an environment--without entering a feedback relation with the "controlled" such that our methods, ideology and technology are irreversibly altered over the history of the relation, and in ways not predictable given only our biases and our intent to control.

The prejudice toward calculation can--within the European tradition--be traced to a fictional source in Plato's Republic; fictional because, while a meaningful attribution, it is hardly exhaustive of all the relevant facts in the history of the ascendance of the calculative mind, however instructive it might be--especially for readers of philosophical literature. In the Republic, not only does Plato openly deny poetry and fiction--paradigmatic literary embodiments of narrative processes--any significant place or role in education of his ideal society's elite, the primary thrust of the 'organization' of society he recommends is to ensure that truth will be one and universally recognized. In the context of the political and economic turmoil existing in Platonic times, it is hardly surprising that security, stability and behavioral synchrony are held in highest esteem. The search for and eventually the embodiment of the Good is itself predicated on there being a real hierarchy (albeit one with Ideas or Forms as highest) which is not subject to change due

to the exigencies of perspective. Thus, the twin projects of laying a secure foundation of knowledge and bringing about a universal, rational agreement have gone hand in hand since classical Greek times.

As might be expected from our remarks above, it is evident that there occurs within the Indian religious/philosophical tradition a similar commitment to taking truth to be absolute, eternal and universal. As Hansen (1981) has argued, in sharp contrast with classical Chinese thought where knowledge is spoken of and conceived as a skill (knowing-to or knowing-how-to), the European and Indian philosophical traditions share a bias for seeing knowledge in propositional terms (knowing-that). While Hansen's argument is largely philological, he points out that the epistemologies proper to the Indo-European and Chinese traditions differ dramatically not only in the underlying senses of their epistemic vocabulary, but in their problems as well. Specifically, he notes that the Chinese tradition, unlike the Indo-European, shows little if any concern for skepticism (1981:322ff). He attributes this to the fact that the latter tradition sees knowledge in terms of belief states which are finally seen as mental states. Instead of concerning themselves with epistemic **activities** as in China, the Indo-European epistemologist focuses on epistemic **states** which, because propositional in nature, are generic and capable of universal adoption. In terms of the manner in which we have distinguished narration and calculation, it is arguable that skepticism should be seen as the progeny of calculation.[14]

Within the contemporary world, cultural differences with respect to the basic constituents of experience have become so apparent that many of our most perspicacious and free thinkers have announced not only the death of God (the generator of order), but of the rational ideal of universal agreement as well. That is, a despair has arisen with respect to realizing universal agreement on any significant beliefs (mental states). And so rises the 'specter' of relativism--what I believe we must see as the ghost of absolute

standards and universally accepted principles and truths. Relativism and pluralism are natural responses to the manifest failure of calculation to bring about universal agreement, but they are not yet free of that mode of inquiry. Their rejection is--as so often the case in the personal sphere, be it psychological or social--in actuality a deep form of attachment. It is a retreat of calculation, but not its defeat since relativism presumes calculated differences, individual and inherently isolated knowers, and (typically) the existence of a real world independent of us as knowers. There is, indeed, no place for narration in relativism as such insofar as the latter's basic stance is "to each their own": no story does, or even can be hoped to thoroughly connect the various worlds constituted by different individuals and/or traditions. Relativism embraces atomism and casual, not fully mutual relations among persons and the traditions of which they are members.

Unlike the Buddhist tradition, epitomized in Nagarjuna's claim that the Buddha relinquishes **all** views and professes no doctrine, not even that of the complete relativity (sunyata) of all things, the contemporary relativist holds that there are many, finally incommensurable worlds. Hence, it is held that there are many possible horizons of relevance or reality, none of them absolute, and that freedom consists in simply remaining true to one's own perspective while allowing others theirs. The Buddhist goes much further, calling for the continual dissolution of all limits to inquiry, all horizons to relevance--not as a final position or stand, but as an ongoing practice, the practice of emptiness.[15] Relinquishing all views as they become apparent **as such** is not only to eschew any lapse into habitual reaction, it is the fostering of a true beginner's mind in every situation, no matter how apparently familiar, since no two 'events' or 'sets of circumstance' or 'entities' can ever be fully equivalent.

Under the force of calculative inquiry, knowledge gradually ceases to be thought of as a cardinal virtue by means of which our relationships with 'what is' are both mutual

and sensitively apt.[16] As a virtue, knowledge is that which enables us to achieve goods internal to our chosen practices and the absence of which shall nearly always preclude such attainment. Because practices are related to the attainment of excellence and **not** a simple, specific goal, they are **not** instrumental in nature. Knowledge cannot therefore be reduced to "what allows us to accomplish what we want", and suggests that the pragmatist is not telling a whole story. Instead, knowledge is that which connects us with a continuum of relationships with a chosen practice in such a way that we unremittingly divest ourselves of our opinions of what is "good" or "enough", and so unceasingly revise our concept of what is apt or workable. That is, knowledge is the virtue of ceaselessly dissolving all horizons of relevance.[17] Excellence is not an achievement, but an unending endeavor. This sense of the word is nicely illustrated in the Chinese Buddhist use of Tao as a synonym of enlightenment or manifest excellence in the practice of the Buddha Dharma. For the Chinese, *tao* includes the connotation of a way as a direction or path (not a destiny or destination, an end) as well as a way as a manner-in-which. As such, it is best seen as marking the quality of our interrelation--the most concretely realized form of our narration. And given the metaphysical presuppositions of the Taosist and Confucian educated purveyors of early Chinese Buddhism, the adoption of *tao* as a synonym for the realization of the Buddhist Path can only indicate that the community so constituted is not limited to the human sphere but must be understood as co-extensive with the cosmos as evolving whole. Excellence is, therefore, never definable merely in terms of a list of privately or individually possessed characteristics, and knowledge is never passively "of" or "about" anything.

The typical construal of knowledge, however, is practically indistinguishable from "an organized group of facts" or "accurate information". We have come to think of knowledge as something both possessable **and** transferable, a conception incompatible

with seeing knowledge as virtue, as something which--as so often stated in the Ch'an tradition--cannot be transmitted. So understood, it is clear that knowledge cannot be "communicated" so long as we mean by this "successfully transferring information about X". To begin with, knowledge is never "about" anything directly. Information properly satisfies the need to name that sort of relation of ideal(generic) and real(unique) structures. Secondly, since knowledge pertains to excellence by way of practice and thus bears explicitly on relevance or values, sharing knowledge cannot mean subtracting from one and adding to another, but coordinating, establishing a resonance of priorities and conduct. Sharing knowledge is the establishing of a commons in the axiological domain, not a pooling of factual, public currencies.

What is most crucially at stake here is the impression we have that knowledge can be predicated with terms like "true", "false", "correct", "valuable" and "worthless". From the calculative perspective, nothing could be clearer. But as a virtue in a narrative context, knowledge is perhaps best seen simply as the capacity for truth, where truth is defined as an operation or practice of correcting--that is, as a form of conduct.

To say, then, that we know how to explain something has no simply transparent meaning. Where knowledge is allied with belief states and information, explaining is to provide an account for a matter in question which brings a given inquiry to a close. Typically, this is an internally consistent announcement of **what** the matter **is** and how it has come to be. An explanation provides all we need to know about an affair. Paramount here is the admission that, as such, explanations are relative to what we may refer to as a horizon of explication, the parameters of which are a function of the inquirer's individual perspective and whatever prevailing societal standards exist regarding general notions of validity. Explanations are in this sense subjective limits which cannot but be historically constituted and hence prone to revision and/or rejection when the horizons for explication

are either narrowed, expanded, or simply shifted to a different terrain while remaining 'quantitatively' equivalent.

Now, if we understand knowledge as a virtue in the sense just suggested, explaining something is not equivalent to providing a reason for setting an inquiry to rest. To the contrary, an explanation will be seen as that which fruitfully points beyond itself and in so doing begs the inquirer to undertake relinquishing his/her prevailing horizons of relevance. Thus, while an adequate explanation may well bring about a consolidation of what has already been learned from engaging the matter in question, it will also provide the basis for having to ask new, more challenging and illuminating questions capable of drawing ever more apparently disparate and unique (vs. generic) features of experience into a cohering whole. That is, narrative explanation is inextricably bound up with ongoing personal transformation.

Importantly, then, while a calculative explanation ideally results in a nod of acceptance and in essence curtails a conversation, narrative explanation opens up new ranges of experience for discussion, assessment and practice, effectively stimulating further concourse in any given community of inquiry. Habermas' (1981&1987) emphasis on the communicative aspect of rationality is pertinent here both as a partial corrective of the calcualtive tendency toward merely instrumental discourses and the so-called Enlightenment ideal--epitomized in Descartes--of a solitary thinker plumbing the depths of the universe in isolation from others. Consistent with the narrative approach to inquiry, Habermas seemingly recognizes the inherently social nature of knowledge. At the same time, however, he continues to conceive of there being a hierarchy of rational **standards** and remains unswervingly committed to seeing language as essentially propositional and its primary function as that of declaration.(1981:286-88) Communication is then oriented toward reaching propositionally-structured agreements that Habermas sees in terms of

accepted common definitions of situations. In short, Habermas still sees knowledge as a belief state and communication as a means of a community of independent subjects coordinating their mental states. As will be argued in the following chapter, this contrasts rather sharply with a narrative view of communication where the centrality of the concept of rationally-mediated agreement is replaced with that of improvisationally realized harmony in conduct. Thus, as revolutionary as Habermas' proposals initially seem, his belief in the necessity of standards and his identification of arguments--the validity of which is always checked according to the canons of European logic--as the primary mechanism for rational inquiry and agreement predispose him to take a predominantly calculative, European rationality as the paradigm of all reasoning. In the end, the theory of communicative action acts as a corrective only **within** traditions where reason is exemplified in argumentation and where truth is seen as a logical quality and not as a potential of concrete forms of conduct.

By way of illustration, consider that for MacIntyre (1981), the mark of excellence is one conferred by the authority of a community of practitioners and hence is a valuation explicitly internal to a given tradition. For Habermas, the same is essentially true, but he places greatest stress not on one's efforts being ranked or assessed by a group of "masters", but rather on the reciprocally enacted and highly dynamic defense of one's position or efforts. This defense is intended to validate one's actions or beliefs in a community of mutually critical, committed and uncoerced participants sharing a set of common values that are brought to bear in their ongoing assessments of any particular situation-description. The main thrust here is that excellence is not linked to any form of correspondence in terms of **content**, and represents therefore a sizable advance over the realist-objective position of MacIntyre, albeit in the context of an overall framework of conservatism. By contrast, fully narrative excellence must be seen as success in bringing

previously disjunct ranges of relevance into lively concert; that is, a co-ordination which effectively marks the improvised birth of a new community. Quite the opposite of calculative excellence which accrues to either a distinct individual or some team of such individuals, narrative excellence involves bringing new worlds--newly integrated narratives--into play. This amounts to nothing short of realizing an entirely novel form of interpersonality, a community which is always more complex and hence improbable and open to challenge than its predecessors, but also more flexible and therefore not resistant to, but increasingly responsive to the unexpected.

CHAPTER 5

COMMUNICATION:
THE PROCESS OF CH'AN ENLIGHTENMENT

Whenever we enter into communication, we place our 'selves' deeply at risk. Even in the sterile context of a televised speech, by presenting our views--our values--to others, we open ourselves up to challenge. To be sure, as long as the members of our audience conduct themselves in a primarily inertial manner and conceal their own unfathomable depth with a superficial play of stock reactions, we may be able to predict with some accuracy the range and depth of the consequences of what we say. We may even experience a sharpening of those landmark features on our horizons by means of which we maintain our position, by means of which we situate or locate ourselves as someone who is 'here'.

But it is always possible that somebody will refuse to hear and react to our words and expressions as **utterances**, as things which make absolute others, which unequivocally place them outside.[1] That is, someone may actually **respond** to us--taking hold of the verbal punting poles by means of which we at once distinguish our 'selves' and move from point to point in our discourse--pulling us off the raft of objectivity and into the streaming of authentic sociality. There, we may well lose sight of our usual landmarks, those ideally unchanging cardinal points by the sole means of which we were able to maintain a stable orientation, a self-consistent narrative thread.[2]

In communicating, we are in danger of losing the ability to maintain our previously chosen heading. Indeed, the underlying bases of our accustomed navigations--that is, our assumption of beginnings, of the reality of causes, of the objectivity of identity and difference, and so on--are not universal. They, too, are in danger of being

submerged, even eroded. Drawn into and immersed in the confluence of living sociality, the movement of our narrative is continually at risk of being interrupted, of being forced to take an unexpected twist in order to remain viable. And in its most dramatic realization, this twist manifestly folds us into a kind of Mobius strip or Klein bottle so that inside and outside, 'self' and 'other', even the Buberian 'I' and 'Thou' are no longer experienced as self-identical and hence different, but in a very real sense as the same.

In keeping with our discussion of suffering in the first chapter, however, this necessarily entails our seeing communication--and therefore sociality--as the paradigmatic source or topos of suffering. Claiming that Ch'an enlightenment is social and that its realization occurs in communicative encounter is to say, then, that the place of suffering is not different from the place of enlightenment, that *saṃsāra* and the *bodhimandala* are one and the same. Indeed, Ch'an is nothing other than the attainment of this absence of identity and difference in our continuously present responding with 'others'.

Now, these claims can hardly seem intelligible where our intuitions about the nature of communication are grounded on the prejudices of calculation--that is, and as will be argued below, where the paradigm of communication is taken to be verbal discourse. For instance, as long as a person is taken to be a real entity (or process) existing among other real entities in an objective space and time guaranteeing both the identity and difference of any two things (the centrist fallacy), it would seem unavoidably the case that communication will be taken to be a kind of external relationship--the structured mediation of fundamentally isolated consciousnesses. In short, communication will be conceived of as what causes you to understand or know what I am thinking, desiring, willing or asking. It will be taken to consist of a transfer of commonly accessible--that is generically formulated--information from one place to another, of an

exchange of messages, of coming into contact, of reaching agreements. Any talk of the dissolution of the boundaries of self and other will be thought best left to either the authors of romance novels or--what is practically the same thing--to mystics bucking the trends, the much-vaunted 'facts', of both ontogeny and phylogeny.

And yet, just as the calculative construal of knowledge involves the liability of epistemological skepticism--an intractable and paralyzing vacillation between some form of foundationalism on the one hand and some form of relativism on the other--just so, the prevailing construal of communication as mediation eventually forces us to admit the ever-present possibility of failure, of mis-communication, of deception and so on. At the very least, then, the alleged transitivity of communication--an apparently necessary feature of communication seen through the calculative lens of verbal discourse--would seem to unavoidably guide us into the desert of conceptual solipsism, into the admission that agreement (the mark of successful transmission) is asymptotic since we have no way of getting outside of the hermeneutic circle, no way of vaulting the impenetrable ring of interpretation within which all our certainties are necessarily quarantined.

Of course, far from being seen as mitigating against the adoption of a thoroughly calculative model of communication, the 'fact' that attempts at communication can fail is often taken as verification of the calculative assertion of the transitive nature of the act or process of bringing my knowledge or belief states and yours into agreement with one another. And this is the case even though it is by no means clear how we would answer the question of which came first, the construal of communication as a mediating or the 'evidence' of failed communication. After all, there is at least no conceptual or logical impediment to seeing what we might be inclined to deem a **failure** of our attempt to communicate something to someone as nothing more than our being confronted with a wholly unexpected response. To be sure, in any world where reality is associated with the

permanent and hence constant or predictable, an occurrence of the unexpected is incontrovertible evidence that something has gone wrong. Even in the best case scenario, an incursion of the unexpected will be seen as threatening to our habits of thought and action to the precise extent that these habits are at odds with the universal (and unchanging) laws according to which everything necessarily happens, laws which are assumed to be independent of us as knowers. That is, the unexpected does not tell us anything new about reality, but only about the deficiencies in our efforts to model the real world.[3]

But as the Buddha's insistence on the impermanence of all things makes quite evident, this is not the only conceivable kind of world. To the contrary, there are worlds where the unexpected is seen as the irruption of the truly creative and the stable or enduring as being a kind of detritus or ash which--like our fingernails or teeth--may prove useful, but which is no longer alive. In such worlds, there are no failures, but only more or less difficult to follow calls for improvisation.

Indeed, if causes are projections of value (horizons), if the world is karmically and not objectively ordered, and if persons are spatially and temporally indeterminate--that is, if their existence is global and if each of our 'selves' is simply a horizon circumscribing what we value most dearly (i.e., what is 'me' and 'mine')--then communication would have to be seen as an essentially improvised, internal relation. The concept of mediation simply cannot find any sure footing in a world where the root ontological concept is not being (is), but value (seeing as), where it is impossible to augment or enhance any thing or world because everything is irreducibly relational. Thus, the interpenetration of narratives, of worlds, does not bring about a summation or the homogeneity of agreement, but is realized as the birth and growth of an entirely unprecedented whole, an irreducibly complex harmony. In a very literal sense, by entering into communication,

we--that is, our world, our narrative--is irreversibly altered. As might be anticipated, this can be very frightening. How can we not sense a deeply visceral reluctance to open so fully to another that we may completely efface the boundaries on which our separateness and self-control are predicated? What is at risk is not simply our views or ideas, our even our sense of who we are. What is at risk is everything.

Now, if the permanence and universality of the laws of nature, the objectivity of the world, and the association of knowledge and certainty cannot be independently grounded[4], if their status is that of axioms which are never discovered but only chosen, then it should be clear that we cannot appeal to any alleged 'facts' in deciding between a transitive and an intransitive model of communication. Indeed, the appeal to **facts**, to truth as the way things **are**, as a guide for our decisions is simply evidence that we have already chosen our axioms--the central of which is the belief that the question of Being is fundamental. In our own terms, this is as much as to say that calculation--a mode of envaluation that fosters dis-covering and un-covering distinct and self-identical entities--should serve as the ground of human conduct. Insofar as we have argued that Buddhist ontology is best seen as a narrative (and not a calculative) endeavor, and since our present task is the elaboration of a consistently Buddhist theory of communication, this cannot be satisfactory.

And yet, if no appeal is made to facts, this places us in the position of being unable to look at communication from a functionally objective regard. Indeed, it might be objected that what I have been portraying as communication--this improvised elision of the difference between 'self' and 'other'--is not what communication is in our day-to-day experience, but at best what it ought to be. In other words, what I have presented in an informal and highly imagistic way is an ideal of communication--a normative and not descriptive model. This is quite true. Were it the case that I accepted as axiomatic the

existence of a real world, ready and available for my description, I should feel constrained to apologize for my premature lapse into evaluation. But insofar as the objection is really only a confrontational way of begging the leading question of the preceding chapter--is 'what-has-come-to-be' a function of being or value?--an apology is surely not in order since according to the Buddhist, it is value that has precedence. The world is not a matter of fact, but the ineluctable offspring of choice--the expression of our karma. And so, the suggestion that the completeness and integrity of a view on communication is necessarily compromised by its being normative--that is, by its dealing with the exceptional and chosen and not the average and apparently necessary--is simply unfounded.

At the same time, it cannot be denied that our interactions with others are often not aimed at placing our 'selves' or those of anyone else at risk. To the contrary, much of our daily activity is explicitly undertaken in the service of regulating our relations and conduct with others in such a way as to guarantee the absence of unwanted interruptions of our life-narrative. As we shall see below, it is at least arguable that Nagarjuna's doctrine of the two truths should be seen as setting a precedent for the interdependence of these disparate views on communication, and that no theory of communication, Buddhist or otherwise, can be considered complete unless it explicates their intimate relation.

Thus, while communication can be generally described in terms of the co-ordination of conduct--of lived values--the nature of this co-ordination is not pre-established or in any way universal, but rather arises as a function of our concrete orientations or modes of envaluation. In very brief, to the extent that we adopt either a calculative or narrative bearing, communication will tend to initiate and maintain either the societal or social--to bring about either an ideally universal and relatively enduring agreement or a unique and ever-changing harmony.

As should be evident, however, where our primary concern is practical wholeness and not theoretical completeness, these orientations may not have anything like the same value in serving our interests. More to the point, where the ultimate good or fruit (*paramārtha*) of all practice is seen as enlightenment--especially enlightenment in the Ch'an sense--these two orientations cannot be considered even remotely equivalent. In order to productively explore the root of this disparity, we are obliged to inquire more deeply into the communicative implications of calculation and narration.

A. The Meaningful Disparity of Calculative and Narrative Approaches to Communication.

While there have been some attempts to acknowledge the importance of considering the non-verbal in any full theory of communication, the body's postures and gestures have invariably been seen as a kind of vocabulary, as a culturally informed set of intermediaries on the basis of which communication can be effected. The very term "body-language", which has become standard in this area of research, evidences the extent to which we have reduced the vibrant complexity of the whole of the human body's communicative activity--its scents, temperatures, energies, and rhythms--to a kind of discourse based on a commonly held system of signs, the paradigm of which is verbal (either written or oral) interaction.

Now, crucial to accepting the validity of such a reduction is not only the supposition that communication necessarily involves expression--that is, the symbolic or significant pressing-out of something which is originally and perhaps unredeemably hidden or internal into a public space and time--but the belief that this mediation can only be successful where the means of expression is fundamentally generic. In other words, we must first accept that the function of communication is bridging the gap between our radically disparate subjectivities, and, secondly, that mutual understanding is possible

only when the timbers out of which these bridges are constructed are equally available to and in fact substantially shared by all of us who enter into communication with one another.

In a particularly lucid formulation of this view, the sociologist Alfred Schutz states that "successful communication is possible only between persons, social groups, nations, etc., who share a substantially similar system of relevances," that "any [successful] communicative process must, therefore, involve a set of common abstractions or standardizations," and that "the typification required for sufficient standardization is provided by the vocabulary and the syntactical structure of the ordinary vernacular of the mother tongue." (1967, I:323)

In the terms used above, however, this entails that the first movement of communication be one of either explicit or implicit calculation. We must grasp the unique indeterminacy of our lived-experience by means of the relatively enduring standards (verbal or gestural) of our language community, allowing necessarily generic signs or typifications to stand for or represent what is in actuality unlike anything else that has or will ever come about, and to then transmit this abstraction of the living texture of our narrative to others in the hope that they will manage to "take our meaning" from it.

The fact that this abstractive process becomes 'second nature' for us, falling out of direct consciousness except where we experience the (by no means rare) sensation of being unable to "say what we mean," is of course no warrant for considering it anything other than an artifice--a habitually-used technology which transforms us even as we use it to transform others. It has over the last quarter century, for example, become a commonplace in philosophical, psychological and linguistic circles that our languages--or more specifically the decisions embodied in our vocabularies and grammars--deeply influence and perhaps at times even determine the quality and range of our perceptions.

Insofar as this is true, however, our manner of discourse necessarily influences or determines the orientations of our conduct as well.[5] If Schutz is correct, then, if communication always depends on an initial process of typification, of standardization and abstraction, it is sharply prejudiced toward calculation and therefore liable to establishing and maintaining societal and not social relations. Hence Ch'an's oft repeated claim that it is a way "beyond words and letters."

This claimed relationship between representative typification--the initial step of any calculation--and the societal bears closer scrutiny. As previously stated, calculation depends on both a decisive or analytic regard of experience and an abstractive or reductive classification of the results of this process of identification and differentiation. It is first necessary that we identify a tree as different from the various bushes, grasses, vines which grow under, around and even on it. Once this original decision is made--once we have cut that portion of our experience which we shall refer to as "tree" from the rest of our experience--it is possible to distinguish the accidental and essential features of the tree by comparing it to other similar objects. In doing so, we reduce the full presence of any given tree with its unique tactile and aural textures, its scents, hues, flavors and spiritual or energic relationships to the land and sky out of and into which it grows, and develop a concept of 'tree' allowing us to grasp together all of those portions of experience which are identical in the (at least) currently decisive or relevant respects.

From this point on, our interactions with trees are initially mediated by the concept which we have put together. In short, we will tend to treat all trees alike. This is not, of course, to deny that different people will not perceive and respond to the presence of trees in very different ways. If we are seven years old and typically rambunctious, we are likely to see trees as things to climb or build houses in. If we are gardeners, we will see trees in terms of their fruit-bearing capabilities, their aesthetic possibilities, shade-

giving properties and so on. If we are loggers, we shall see them in terms of their density, graining, difficulty in cutting and so on. It is even clear that over the course of a lifetime, we will acquire many concepts useful in mediating our encounters with trees. What is important in terms of the communicative impact of calculation is that the reductively arrived-at concepts come to regulate our conduct--to establish habitual patterns of perception and action--and not only with respect to the non-human features of the world like trees, but to one another. The relevance-determining concepts of father, mother, son, daughter, friend, boss, employee, intelligence, sensitivity, emotion and so on, all guide us into commonly defined and often only tacitly endorsed forms of thought, speech and behavior which tend to discourage our engaging in truly free improvisation.

Thus, because the dominant medium of any calculatively enacted communication (language) is itself open to access by all--a kind of common property denied to no one--in speaking the same language we become like one another.[6] We see one another as a people who share a common tongue and view those who do not as outsiders, foreigners, barbarians, aliens. At the very least, speaking the same language entails our contacting one another through an array of relatively generic relations--as interlocutors, as business partners, as colleagues, as kith or kin. That is, **who** we communicate with is only very rarely an explicitly unique person and not an abstraction, the player of a standard role with respect to us.

To speak the same language is, at bottom, to decide what exists between us--the projection of a set of shared horizons for relevance. What is established in adopting the same tongue is never just the possibility of transferring or storing certain concepts, wishes, intentions, or other more complex mental states of affairs, but the articulation of what matters and what does not--that is, the construction of a particular and yet explicitly universalized mode of existence: our way of life.

In this light, the very real phenomenon of xenophobia appears as less a function of the perception of a physical threat emanating from a stranger, than of the realization that we can't use our usual patterns of speech, posture, facial expression and so on to regulate our interactions with them. He or she does not walk in our institutions, but outside of or around them, and is hence always capable of doing the unexpected. At times, this is simply making a *faux pas*, a matter of their committing some relatively innocuous mistake that we can easily enough gloss over. But at other times, the unexpected comes as a much more pointed and profound interruption or demand, one that wrenches us out of the comfort of our usual roles and brings about the profoundly disturbing experience of the tilting away of our accustomed horizons. It is ultimately not that the outsider is different that causes us to fear him or her--after all, no two individuals are identical--but the fact that they relativize the ground of our certainty, calling into question with their mere presence the stable landmarks according to which we guide our daily comings and goings, by means of which we establish what is 'home' and what is not. We fear the outsider because he or she reminds us at a deeply visceral level that all of our certainties are conventional.[7]

If all existence is chosen in the sense indicated in the previous chapter--that is, if every 'thing' comes about through setting certain, relatively stable horizons for relevance--the conventional nature of our interactions with others is not necessarily without its virtues. To be sure, it can lead to what Heidegger referred to as mere talk, the eschewal of an authentic being toward or for others, but it also serves to streamline our efforts at co-ordinating our activities and those of others. By relating to one another through the conventions of 'social' position, political affiliation, legal responsibility and so on, we dispense with the need to reach active consensus with the people we come into contact

with on a daily basis. As indicated earlier, societal interactions are characteristically much more efficient, less demanding of attention and personal input, than social relations.[8]

As it applies to communication, this efficiency manifests most clearly in the calculative tendency to see meaning in terms of basic units--the word, the speech act, the thesis, the law and so on. Adopting Husserl's vocabulary, Schutz points out that while any verbal communication involves a time process, "a step by step [or polythetic] articulation of successive elements... the meaning of the sentence or the speech can be projected by the speaker and grasped by the listener in a single ray [or monothetically]." (1967, I:324) In direct contrast with the narrative construal of meaning as the initiation of an unbounded transformation of conduct--the recursive and always incomplete novelization of the interpersonal, in a calculative context, meanings arise as the summation or essence of a linear progression. We may have to listen to our conversation partner's words one by one until they finish, or read a passage in a book sentence by sentence, but at the outcome of this constitutive process, we can grasp the resulting conceptual meaning at a glance, and apart from the polythetic steps by which it was constituted.

Schutz offers as an example our ability to monothetically grasp the meaning of the Pythagorean theorem even though we can no longer remember how it is derived (1967, II:172), but it is absolutely commonplace that we do the same thing in giving a very succinct account of what someone said to us last week even though we cannot remember a single word they said. The meaning of their utterances does not depend on the form or manner in which they were originally cast.

Importantly, this implies that calculative meanings are essentially atemporal, that they can be divorced without loss from the processes through which they were constituted. It is not imperative, therefore, that we recall word for word, gesture for gesture, the conversation we had yesterday in order to unfold its meaning. In fact, the

(calculative) meaning of our encounter seems to exist independently of our conduct with and toward one another. Thus, Algis Mickunas states that:

> What is communicated or remains constant through the variations of things and words, is their **meaning**...[and] in this sense things and events constitute exchangeable examples of meanings without dictating a particular meaning they exemplify. **The communicative process is an aim at a common meaning which is without spatio-temporal or environmental restrictions and need not change with variations in the spatio-temporal phenomena, and thus is capable of maintaining the constancy required for communication.** (1982:57)

While the calculative nature of Mickunas' overall characterization of communication should be clear, it is worth pointing out that his insistence that words, events and things are "exchangeable examples of meanings" is comprehensible only where meanings must be transmitted from place to place, from isolated self to isolated self, and where the medium of communication is inherently generic or representational. Thus, Mickunas concludes his paper by noting that even though a dialogue can occur between two persons exploring one another in an "erotically entranced way," this is possible only because each of them have a prior grounding in "'the natural-cultural fields' toward and in terms of which the dialogical partners are oriented." (1982:68) Since the meanings at which we aim are held to be constant--that is, disconnected with the temporality of lived experience, with the workings of Mead's 'I'--our concentration on them will tend to precipitate highly regulated and 'complete' interactions with one another. Thus, our dealings with the bank teller each week are discrete and yet effectively identical as long as we concern ourselves with the (calculative) meaning of the interaction--depositing most of our paycheck so that we can pay our bills, set money aside for our vacations, our retirement, or the education of our children. It is only when this meaning is no longer foremost, when, for instance, our gazes unaccountably lock and remain locked that we see one another as persons, not as mere people, as 'teller' and

'customer'. Only then might we truly enter one another's lives and not simply re-appear in a regular fashion at their well-defined peripheries.

John Searle, while working a very different philosophical vein from Mickunas, arrives at significantly similar conclusions regarding the process of communication. He states, for example, that not only is it the case that "one cannot intend to communicate without intending to represent" (1983:173)--that is, without undertaking an abstractive mediation--but that all our utterances or assertives "are supposed to match an independently existing reality, so that an assertion would not be satisfied if it caused the state of affairs it represents." (1983:166) That is, an assertion must not only represent a state of affairs (usually either mental or material), it must do so in such a way that it is not temporally bound up with those affairs. It must exist at some sort of remove from them so that its occurrence and the occurrence of the state of affairs are independent of one another. In Mickunas' terminology, our assertions must be exchangeable with respect to what they represent. They must, in a word, be conventional.

Hence, for both Mickunas and Searle, in communicating we do not relate directly (even if externally) with one another, but only through the universally accessible and hence functionally generic medium itself--Mickunas' self-field-self triad. Whether this medium is the so-called natural world or language makes little difference. Our relationships with others will tend to be irreducibly mediate, understanding will always entail some kind of transmission, and communication will foster not the improvised liveliness of true sociality, but the societal realization of lasting agreement.[9]

However, if we allow the Buddhist criticism that all things (*dharmas*) are impermanent projections of value, there can be no independently existing entities (whether things in the objectively real world or universal concepts or laws) and Searle's condition for assertives could never be satisfied. Indeed, we could not say anything **about**

the world at all. We should instead realize that the prepositional attitude--the attitude that we can stand over, against, before, beside, above, below or beyond others--is fundamentally misleading. In very brief, it leads us away from the realization of our interdependence with all things to a fantasized location outside of and apart from the rest of the world. In Buddhist terms, this is nothing other than ignorance (*ăvidya*-literally, not seeing)--that cultivated blindness to the relativity of all difference and identity which is the root condition of all suffering.

All of the foregoing strongly suggests that while verbal discourse serves rather well as the paradigm of any calculative communication, it necessarily fails to do so where our primary orientation is narrative. As was discussed earlier, narratives should be seen as recursively articulated improvisations which are unavoidably incomplete. We simply cannot achieve closure with respect to them, and in result we can never explain them or represent their meaning with a single proposition or even a set of propositions. That is, unlike calculative utterances--even utterances as extensive as Descartes' Meditations--narration cannot be summarized or grasped monothetically. Indeed, the meaning of our narration is never the **object** of our inquiry, but is rather the very unfolding of that narration itself.[10]

Whereas discourse entails the maintenance of our difference as individuals involved in a process of exchange through the regulating institutions of a shared/common language and amounts to an always completeable project of making or getting a point, concourse not only tends to elide such differences, it eludes definition even where it playfully incorporates the prevailing conventions by means of which we typically regulate one another. Unlike discursive communication, concourse does not depend on the existence of a typifying medium. Instead, it should be seen as arising only with the relinquishing of all media. The Mahayanic emphasis on *upāya* or skillful means, far from

being a recognition of the ultimate and independent value of the certitude provided by our conventions, actually celebrates their employment as a pivot--not as the point of conversation, but as relatively fixed opportunities for us to turn together in unhesitating improvisation.

B. Seeing Musical Concourse and not Verbal Discourse as the Paradigm of Communication.

In his paper, "Making Music Together: A Study in Social Relationship", Schutz claims that the meaning structure of the musical process is not capable of being expressed in conceptual terms, and that while the social interactions proper to music making are founded on communication, they do not rely "*primarily* upon a semantic system used by the communicator as a scheme of expression and by his partner as a scheme of interpretation." (1967, II:159) In terms of the contrasts discussed in the preceding section, this suggests that music-making might provide a concrete paradigm for narrative communication--for communication seen as the on-going articulation of immediate and unique internal relationships and not as the generically mediated exchange of information about either subjective or objective states of affairs.

Schutz bases his claim on the observation that--as is also the case with other "time-objects" like dance, poetry, and making love--musical meaning cannot be grasped monothetically. Unlike verbal discourse, "the musical content, its very meaning, can be grasped merely by reimmersing oneself in the ongoing flux, by reproducing thus the articulated musical occurrence as it unfolds in polythetic steps in inner time." (1967,II:173) That is, musical meaning cannot be separated off from the process by means of which the piece of music is constituted. In a very significant sense, musical meaning cannot be an abstraction. If I want you to understand the meaning of Coltrane's "A Love Supreme", I have no recourse but to replay the piece in its entirety since it is

only in this way that you will have the opportunity to participate "with quasi simultaneity in [Coltrane's] stream of consciousness by performing with him step by step the ongoing articulation of his musical thought." (1967, II:171) It is Schutz's thesis that "this sharing of the other's flux of experiences in inner time, this living through a vivid present in common, constitutes...the mutual tuning-in relationship...which is at the foundation of all possible communication." (1967, II:173)

What is most interesting for us about Schutz's description of the sharing of musical meaning is that while it can be taken as an implicit denial that anything **definite** is transmitted from the composer to the listener in the music-making process, this ambiguity is not seen as in any way a communicative deficiency. Extending Schutz's discussion of music-making in the direction of full narration, it can even be claimed that the value of listening to music is not that we will learn **about** the composer's musical thought by attending to his or her composition, or even that we will glean **from** the performance a concisely formulateable meaning which is specifically our own. Indeed, it is arguable that the communicative relationship between composer and listener is simply not characterizable in prepositional terms, as a kind of **from-to**.

Far from maintaining the presumed disparity of composer and listener, musical experience tends to override the objectifying regard by means of which a space of incommensurability opens up between performer and audience, the creator and the appreciator. By polythetically apprehending the musical structure, the streams of consciousness of both composer and listener actually flow into one another and interpenetrate. The point of listening to music, then, is not to acquire some abiding 'meaning' aesthetically encoded in the musical structure, but rather is given in the process of the "I" and "Thou" growing old together and experiencing this togetherness as a vibrantly open "We". (1967, II:161) Musical meaning is thus not something which is

grasped, which appears **in** consciousness, but is instead the mutually transformative harmonization of consciousnesses, the living of shared inner time.

Granted this, it should come as no surprise that our favorite composers and musical artists are not typically thought of as teachers--people who convey important information to us about this or that topic of concern--but rather as friends. While Schutz uses the phrase "growing old together" only with reference to the actual experience of listening to music--that unique flux of inner time which nevertheless takes place in the objective and perfectly general temporality of minutes, hours and days--there is a sense in which a piece of music, once truly listened to, never ends. In opening ourselves fully to the music, we not only take it intimately into ourselves, the music also draws us deeply into itself, incorporating us in such a way that our future conduct, our thoughts and feelings, our expressions of frustration, sadness, love, and joy are all part of its meaning. Our world changes. And since in a narrative sense our world is **who** we truly are, this is as much as to say that musical communication should be seen as personal transformation. Indeed, in the most intense listening experiences, I cannot help but feel that **we** are creating the music--just as an evening of lovemaking is never my doing or yours, but always and irreducibly ours.

Musical meaning is thus fundamentally communal. At least as narratively construed, musical meaning is not something dwelling in a particular array of notes and rhythm, but a flowing together--literally a concourse--in which 'self' and 'other' cease to be identified as such, in which we no longer exist as profane individuals even though we have not removed ourselves to the lonely and sacerdotal heights of religion, science or philosophy. And because musical meaning cannot be grasped monothetically, but only lived, it is best seen as a kind of practice--an always ongoing refinement of conduct or interpersonality.[11]

The absolutely ubiquitous use of music in establishing ritual connections not only between various members of a society, but between developmental phases of a person's life should not be seen, then, as a mere technique for trance induction or a superficial regulation of group dynamics. It is instead a concrete way of establishing or drawing creative attention to the most intimate of bonds between persons--bonds which can be societal or social depending on whether the music is highly structured and traditional or largely improvisational.[12]

Now, such a view of music--as extrapolated on the basis of Schutz's insights--stands in sharp contrast to that articulated, for example, by Suzanne Langer who argues that the lasting effect of music "is, like the first effect of speech on the development of the mind, to *make things conceivable* rather than to store up propositions", and, therefore, that its function is "not communication, but insight..." (1951:207). Operating from a decisively linguistic frame of reference, Langer claims that "music has all the earmarks of a true symbolism, except one: the existence of an *assigned connotation.*" (1951:203) Lacking this, music may well be able to suggestively call to mind emotive, vital and sentient experiences, but its import can never be fully determinate. It has neither a basic vocabulary nor a meaning-generating grammar by the means of which it would be possible to make unambiguous statements about the world or even about our experiences of it. "Articulation is [music's] life," as Langer puts it, "but not assertion; expressiveness, not expression. The actual function of meaning, which calls for permanent contents, is not fulfilled; for the *assignment* of one rather than another possible meaning to each form is never explicitly made." (1951:204) In short, for Langer music is not communicative because it fails to live up to the calculative requirements of verbal discourse.

At bottom, what Schutz invites us to do in entertaining the requirements of music-making as the concrete basis for all communication is nothing less than an inversion of

the ontological structure presupposed by verbal discourse--a structure in which beings ground values, in which permanence underlies change, in which causes antedate their effects, in which persons are taken to be externally related individuals, in which unpredictability or indeterminacy is a function of error, and in which the world precedes and is essentially unaffected by our propositions about and knowledge of it. To the extent that this is the case, Schutz shares the overall orientations of a narrative theory of personality according to which entering into communication is seen as immediate and mutual personal transformation and never merely a process of learning **about** one another.[13] In this sense, communication is best seen as a concoursing--literally a "flowing together," not as discourse--a "flowing apart." In verbal discourse, what flows apart are not just subject and object, the object and its attributes, any 'this' from every 'that', but speaker and listener, you and I--partners in conversation who remain throughout essentially apart from one another, individual.

It should be evident that if this inversion is carried out completely, the practice of musical concourse will lead to a suspension of our typically uninterrupted projection of identity and difference. At the very least, the boundary between composer and listener will blur with the intensity of the sharing of Schutz's "inner time," being erased altogether when the listener opens fully to the music.[14] It is not the case, then, that we are transported by music from the mundane 'here' to some transcendent 'there', but that we realize in a very concrete way our radical indeterminacy as persons.

C. Improvisation and the Concourse of Lived Interpersonality.

Thus far, we have adopted Schutz's basic vocabulary in sketching out the lineaments of a narrative model of communication based on the paradigm of music-making. At this point, however, it is crucial that we make a break with Schutz and his phenomenologically-guided inquiry.

As stated in the previous section, Schutz bases his conclusions regarding the uniqueness of music-making as a communicative paradigm on the distinction of monothetic and polythetic processes of meaning constitution. In the latter, the listener is said to "perform along with" the composer the step by step articulation of the composer's musical thought. Doing so, the listener does not in any definitive way 'grasp' the meaning of the composer's work, but rather lives out that meaning as the flux of his own inner time. Listener and composer become a "we" in vivid presence.

While this description of music-making marks a significant improvement over discursive models of communication (musical or otherwise), it falls short of providing a tenable biography of communication's role in the realization of sociality. To begin with, in adopting composed music as the model case for studying music-making, Schutz is only partially able to overcome the complex of causal metaphors according to which communication is taken to be a kind of transmission. That is, while he stresses the resulting synchrony of the composer's and listener's inner time in the musical experience, it is clear that the composer initiates the communication by writing or performing his/her piece of music. Only given this precedent can the listener "perform along with" the composer the step-by-step articulation of the latter's musical thought and realize a common, lived present.

Strictly speaking and contrary to the requirements of a fully narrative constitution of communicative encounter, given the priority of the composer's contribution to the musical experience, it is not the case that Schutz's listener enters the same stream of consciousness as the composer. Rather, they flow and age alongside of one another, intimate and yet asymmetrically related to the musical structure providing the concrete occasion for this resonance. The inner times of composer and listener are thus not the same, but rather parallel courses of narrative unfolding.

Moreover, insofar as a piece of composed music remains constant over time, and insofar as the exercise of the listener's creativity is never actually contributory but is at best limited to selective concentration, the musical experience will tend to regulate the awareness of the audience in such a way as to render it a relatively homogenous whole. Thus, the joint participation of the composer and listeners in the constitution of musical meaning is liable to bring about an ideally perfect agreement between their parallel and yet separate courses of inner time. In short, Schutz's account of music-making points to the realization of what is arguably a largely societal and not social form of interpersonality.

Because the ontology underlying verbal discourse entails asserting the precedence of causes over their effects, discourse-based models of communication tend to take the vectoral act of utterance and not the circular and often simultaneous ebb and flow of conversation as the primary source or locus of meaning. For instance, whenever communicative 'failure' is experienced, our first impulse is to ask our interlocutor what they meant by this or that remark, what connotations they assign to this or that key word. We go back to what we take to be the 'source' or 'root' of meaning. While this move both insures our independence from one another and strengthens our conviction that meanings are in some sense 'contents' which can be grasped and held, the overall aim of this genealogical move is for us to trace our way back to a universally assented to point of signification--a point at which our individual differences can be seen as purely contingent. Only having first located this shared conceptual ancestor, is it possible to 'reconstruct' our individual lineages in such a way as to guarantee continued agreement. In short, when we disagree, we tend to analyze our togetherness into generically meaningful atoms in order eventually and on agreed-upon foundations to rebuild the molecular structure of our interchange in a mutually intelligible manner.

Schutz explicitly denies the possibility of this atomization of meaning in music, but in seeing music-making as based on composition, he effectively shackles it with several of the key structural features of discourse--importing a manifestly hierarchic seriality into the genesis of what was to have been a singularly unifying experience and predicating this unification on the composer and listener jointly entering what is for the latter a pre-determined musical course. After all, composer and listener cannot be the same--that is, they cannot be true equals in non-identity--because it is the composer who generates the shared structure for their inner times, who tells the listener what to hear, what to experience. The listener can choose to reject this prescription, can refuse to open him or herself to its influence, but has no power to change it. If all music were composed, musical meaning--like the meanings proper to propositionally-biased verbal interchanges--would have to be seen as basically dictatorial.[15]

Now, it is a discursive commonplace that we cannot speak and listen at the same time. At least, this is what we are taught from a very early age: understanding someone else involves allowing them to "speak their piece" and questioning or answering them only once they are finished. We are not simultaneously a speaker and a listener (except in the not altogether trivial sense that we listen to what we are saying and are at times surprised by what we hear), but are constrained to play these roles in alternation in order to carry on a real dialogue. At any given time, one party is supposed to be conveying something by means of individually meaningful utterances while the other is taken to be responsible for accepting or rejecting this message.[16]

In more philosophical terms, Habermas makes much the same claims as "common sense," not only insisting that all communicatively achieved agreement must be propositionally differentiated, but that the attitude toward reaching agreement can be understood in terms of the model of the attitude of participants in communication--"one

of whom (in the simplest case) carries out a speech act to which the other takes a yes or no position." (1981:287) From a narrative perspective, and in spite of his hope of determining the necessary structure of all non-coerced agreement, Habermas' insistence that the role of the listener is to either affirm or deny propositions regarding some (ostensibly) objective state of affairs should be seen as an institutionalization of the structure of ultimatum. In effect, I say "this is the way I figure things" and your only recourse is to measure my proposition against reality and say "that's right" or "that's wrong." Even if you add reasons why you figure things differently than I do, this only reverses our roles, it does not bring about a dissolution of the structure of ultimatum. Through such discourse, we come to be identified as 'friend' or 'foe'.

In sharp contrast, the participants in free improvisation--the members, say, of the Grateful Dead or Ornette Coleman's Double Quartet--are all simultaneously composing and listening.[17] Regardless of whether the musicians involved all start playing at once or if one of them offers an initial note, chord or rhythmic figure, it is never the case that any of them are trying to make a statement, to exteriorize something they want to "get across" to all the others, or to either play or produce variations on a pre-ordained theme. Instead, it is always the communally realized temperament of the music that both evokes their performance and embodies the meaning of what they play.

A communally improvised 'piece' of music like the Double Quartet's "Free Jazz" does not propose anything about the world or even about the states of the musicians' minds. Playing together, the eight musicians create a new world, a jointly performed tale in which each of them is continually becoming someone else, someone who is neither identical to nor different from all the other characters in play. Drummers and bass players do not play off of one another as individual sources of raw musical material so much as they hear themselves and are heard as a throbbing musical heart that both drives and is

driven by all the horn and piano players. Whenever a solo appears, it is not conceived and then executed in seriality, but courses through the musician and his instrument, flowing from that unlocated, unlocateable source of the unexpected lying outside of every horizon, every name and form.

This flow comes about when the musician stops checking, when he stops figuring out what to play and abandons the projection of the known, the hunger for closure, for sense. Then a 'miracle' occurs--the flying sinuosity of a completely unpremeditated saxophone or trumpet solo. At such moments, we do not make music, but are made by or--better still--become it. In losing our boundaries, slipping into the incandescent concourse which is the essence of musical improvisation, we no longer anticipate or follow our fellow musicians but are released into an unmitigated sameness in which anything can occur even though absolutely nothing is lacking. There is no deliberation, no calculation--only the singing we have become in the total absence of any 'song'.

The aim of improvisation is not to negotiate or regulate an agreement about how things are, but rather the creation of a novel harmony through jointly articulating a new world--be it musical, poetic, choreographic, or erotic. The words, notes, gestures or play of sensations that we use in improvising are, in fact, of no **lasting** importance. Nor is it the case that we improvise in order to get somewhere, to arrive at some pre-determined end by whatever means possible. Falling prey to such a disposition is in Buddhist terms to turn into a hell the very 'other shore' toward which we move with the help of the raft of the Buddha's teachings. Improvisation is concerned with opening up, with divesting ourselves of horizonal constraints through responding with others even while they are responding with us. In effect, improvisation is the eschewal of all destination--what in Buddhist terms can be seen as making use of karma rather than allowing our entanglement in the often beguiling trap of destiny.

In this sense, improvisation is incompatible with a calculative epistemology founded on the association of knowledge and the attainment of closure. Not only are all of its 'elements' variables in the sense that their meaning is irreducibly both polythetic and continually changing, the improvisation as a whole can never be duplicated, can never become common property--something possessed. Instead, the understanding relations it brings about are narrative--that is, spontaneously recursive and necessarily incomplete courses of conduct--and not some fixed testaments about "the way things are". In this sense, and contrary to the discursive intuitions of Habermas, understanding is not a function of agreement--the excision of all that is uncertain and hence unsatisfactory--but comes about instead with our increasingly flexible and sensitive harmonization with the unexpected contributions of others. Whereas the ideal of agreement is full universality--everyone assenting to the same propositions about the world, the ideal of improvised harmony is simply the fruition of our diversity--giving birth to new worlds, new persons.

Most importantly, however, for explaining the role of communication in sociality, free improvisation requires the joint articulation of meaning and therefore undermines the hierarchic power structure which appears in any discursive relation between composer/speaker and listener. Not only is there an absence of meaning institutions--fixed or prescribed forms of conduct or response--in the communally improvised articulation of meaning, no one is passive, even if they are at some point only listening and waiting for an opening for their next formal contribution. Since the very act of listening changes the nature of their own and everyone else's performance and since meaning itself is not something transcendent to the whole, always ongoing process of the improvisation, there is no possibility of not contributing as long as one is present. Appreciation is literally adding value, the fostering contribution of an orientation. Thus, even attentive silence is not mere pregnancy, but an exceedingly pure form of giving

birth. Only when we interact habitually is creativity annulled or aborted. Only then do we become a mere people.[18]

Where the concourse of musical improvisation is taken as paradigmatic, the aim of communication cannot--as it is in verbal discourse--be taken to be reaching final agreement, but is seen instead as the unceasing realization of harmony. Whereas agreements are mediated by universally assented to and propositionally structured concepts and amount to the end result obtained by means of a more or less complex process of calculation, harmony in the sense used here is to be seen as an immediate quality of our ongoing responses or conduct--the vibrantly unpredictable tenor of improvisationally realized interpersonality. In short, while the meaning of discursive communication amounts to **what we agree on**, meaning in concursive communication is seen as **how we harmonize**.

In the former, our focus is on some typified expression of individual concerns--something each of us has or possesses. Meaning in this sense is grasped and participates in the maintenance of our difference as independent subjects engaged in the discussion of some object. What discussion accomplishes is the translation of some unique aspect of our world into a typified object which then flows apart and (in the ideal case) perfectly equally into each of our ostensibly separate streams of consciousness. What we discuss becomes something each of us manages to possess through a kind of cloning or virtualization that allows it to be divided among a potentially infinite number of knowers, each of whom can claim it as their own. And so, while calculatively disposed partners in communication may aim at agreeing with one another, this can only be accomplished by agreeing on or about some thing which serves not only to link them, but hold them inexorably apart.

By contrast, concursive meaning reveals itself in the manner in which our world grows. In this sense, meaning is never something transmitted from some definite 'here' to an equally defined 'there', but should be seen as the quality of that recursion by means of which our narration extends and deepens its wholeness. Arising in the unmitigated flux of interdependence, concursive meaning is directly given in conduct--as **ours** and never as merely 'mine' and/or 'yours'. The participants in concursive communication are oriented not toward some mediating thing/idea/event or even toward one another.[19] Instead, and in language that is dissatisfying in its appeal to prepositionality, 'they' are taken up into their relationship in such a way that each 'one' ceases to exist. What remains can be referred to as "concourse", but in actuality it has--like enlightenment--no identifying marks. We may characterize it as 'harmony' as opposed to 'agreement', but that is just skillful means--a distinction which may be useful but is by no means absolute. That is, since existence is a function of envaluation, concourse cannot be a thing (*dharma*) or state arrived at and then maintained or lost, but should be seen as creative orientation, where creativity implies not making or inventing, but the realization of what we shall later refer to as intimacy, or boundless interpenetration (*t'ung*).[20]

Envision, for example, two strangers who meet on a dance floor. Where the orientation of their conduct is effectively discursive, each of them is essentially bound up in and by their thinking, their considerations of the other as 'dance partner', 'potential lover', 'fellow networker', and so on. When their thinking is in agreement, these distinctions act as a kind of cement, binding them in a common definition of 'reality' even as they provide a useful and yet finally insurmountable interface. Such strangers are bound both in the sense of maintaining their contact as 'dancers' or 'lovers' or 'professional acquaintances' and of being thereby limited in the range and depth of their relationship and creativity. To the extent, however, that their conduct is concursive, there

is no thinking and hence no impediment to the realization of an entirely new, untypified and untypifiable relationship. In Ch'an terms, the realization of no-thinking (*wu-nien*) is the entry into the bodhisattva life--the life of unhindered responsiveness, of unexcelled skill in means. Paraphrasing the Heart Sutra, in concourse there are no 'dancers', no 'dance', no 'dance-floor' or 'band'. Irrepressibly fluid, the dancing is at once unique and mythic or archetypal. No moves are anticipated even if they repeat, mudra-like, and yet none precipitate a break in the flow in the musical waving of which each 'dancer' is a part and each of whom are manifestly inconceivable apart form this swinging openness, this enjoyment of what will forever elude placement in any of the three times. Afterward, there may come doubts about where this is all heading and what to **do** next, but in the fullness of concursion there is neither from nor to, only an us depending on neither 'you' nor 'me', 'her' or 'him'. And this is so even if the dancing is with 'death' and the partners are father and son in a hospital room.

None of this should, however, be taken as necessarily allying concourse and exclusively 'positive' moods, emotions, situations or outcomes. Indeed, as the Ch'an indictment of monks who seek only peace and quietude strongly suggests, the exclusive imagination of enlightened life and communication in entirely 'positive' terms is hardly better than indulging in so-called negativity. Bias is a problem--perhaps **the core** problem--regardless of the content or quality it foregrounds. Thus, while the ideal of universal agreement--so prevalent in the Indo-European philosophical traditions--tends to involve our seeing discord as a sign of pathology, a difference to be eradicated, the ideal of harmony involves our respecting discord, seeing it as a sign of continued vitality. As mentioned above, since there is in fact no harmony as such where there is only a single tone, the harmony achieved through improvised concourse must be seen as a relation of interdependence. That is, the presence of 'discord' should be seen as nothing other than an

opportunity to relinquish one or another impeding horizon and evolve new and ever more flexible ways of responding--a new character, something to be prized and not lamented.

And yet, it would be improper to understand the meaning of harmony in a Chinese Buddhist context as determined by the kind of note to note and essentially mathematical relationship underlying the European concept of musical harmony. In fact, the Chinese conception of harmony derives not from the abstract musings of a mathematically-inclined musician, but from the hands-on practice of agrarian sagacity. The distinction can be fleshed out by considering that the graph translated as "harmony" (*ho*) is composed of the individual graphs for "growing grain" (*ho*^{3}) and "mouth" (*k'ou*). To begin with, the choice of growing grain rather than harvested or edible grain (*mi*), prohibits our understanding harmony as a unilateral relationship under the general rubric of satisfaction or the momentary meeting of a need. The temporality proper to harmony is not the instantaneous one of paired notes or the filling of an empty belly, but rather a seasonal and hence cyclic timing--a temporality of ongoing and practical care or appreciation. Growing grain requires at one time and in one locale the draining of fields and at others steady irrigation. It entails attending not only to the ever-changing qualities of soil and sky, but of our co-ordination with the unseen, with the myriad aspects of the worldly Tao. Harmony is in this sense not a kind of individually negotiable ratio, but a truly global relationship--the dynamic wedding of plant and human communities in the context of mutual nurturance or furthering.

Thus, while a discursive understanding of communication would have us bias our efforts toward achieving certainty and self-consistently building upon that solid foundation, taking harmony as our guide orients us toward focusing on the entire narration of which each 'one' of us is but an abstraction. What is valued is not then an unremitting adherence to principles or to the kind of truth which admits of no actual

plurality, but personal fluency--an ability to respond in virtuosic timeliness, free from both hesitation and any reference to set patterns or habits of conduct, be these perceptual, emotive, or active. Moreover, since the Chinese conception of harmony is quite literally communal and not abstract or ideal, communication can never be conceived heirarchically, as a transmission from 'me' to 'you' which connects us only by first establishing a power gradient. Instead, communication must be seen as irreducibly mutual appreciation or envaluation.

In short, if concursive meaning is always lived and never grasped, any systematic approach to attaining communicative virtuosity will involve the practice of relinquishing any horizons presently constraining our ability to caringly and creatively respond with change or challenge. In more properly Buddhist terms, communicative virtuosity should be seen as incomparable skill in ending suffering.[21]

CHAPTER 6

MEANING AS NARRATIVE MOVEMENT: THE HERMENEUTICS OF LIBERATION

Concursive meaning cannot be grasped, but only lived. From the narrative perspective we have been articulating, this is as much as to say that meaning should not be seen as a kind of fixed content, but as movement or transformation--the way our narration flows. Thus, we cannot legitimately reduce the meaning of, for example, holding hands to "a symbol of love or affection". Doing so would amount to a monothetic decision--a cutting away of everything unique and boundless which occurs with and in narrative response to twining our fingers together and walking for a time as one body, one rhythm. As persons, we are not a single, central character **in** a narrative--and certainly not an individual afloat in some stream of objective events--but a limitless narration or interrelation, an entire world. And so taking my hand could never be an isolated and merely physical or symbolic act. It is not a casual contact serving to temporarily mediate our fundamentally distinct consciousnesses, but the creation of shared karma--that is, the improvised mergence of two narratives, the birth of a new world. Communicating is the process of realising that we live within and never without each other.

When Kisagotami approached the Buddha at Jevatana, she entered into his life, his world, and welcomed him into hers. With this simple conduct she initiated the process of healing at least one part of that profound wound of ignorance on which alone our selfishness, our divisiveness and our suffering can be predicated. In responding to her plea for help, the Buddha did not try to locate and close off the source of her suffering, but rather to widen and deepen it. That is, he did not try suggesting that the meaning of the child's death was simply that "all this is impermanent" or that "whatever is born is of

a nature to die". Instead, he asked Kisagotami to go out into the village where she had been born and raised and return one by one to the homes of her neighbors, entering once again into their lives and allowing them back into hers. In communicating with her fellow villagers, Kisagotami perhaps gained the cognitive insight that no life lasts forever and that no matter how short or long a life is, it is never any more or less complete. It is simply going on, a whole world. But whether this discursive insight occurred or not is less important than that by entering each home in the village and speaking with all of her friends and neighbors, Kisagotami came to a place of harmony--the villagers incorporating her grief, her story, into their own and she incorporating theirs. In a word, she began flowing together with them again--re-establishing the shared narrative lost for a time in the madness induced by the shock of her child's death. I would maintain that it is the tenor of this living and open-ended concourse--this socially realized harmony--that should be seen as the proximal meaning of the Buddha asking Kisagotami to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a house never visited by death.

But what grounds are there for asserting **this** as the correct or best interpretation of the story? What insures that I have not freely invented this reading in blatant violation of either the Buddha's intentions or the overall complexion of his teachings? In a word, what warrants the adequacy of my account?

As long as communication is viewed as a kind of transmission or exchange and meaning is considered to be something graspable--the content of a mind (whether an intention or conception) or a linguistic/gestural pattern--such questions are not only legitimate, but of crucial importance. It is, after all, the nature of things which can be grasped that they can also elude apprehension. Referential ambiguity, the use of an unconventional or idiosyncratic vocabulary or grammar, the presence of multiple levels of signification--all can make it likely that what I'm trying to convey will not be properly

comprehended. Interpretations can go astray. Meanings can be misplaced and even lost altogether.

But when meaning is seen concursively--as something lived or practiced--questions about the viability of an interpretation are arguably without the kind of foundation they would require in order to be satisfactorily answered. In the context of a narratively generated ontology where value preceeds being, the appeal to some fixed 'object'--whether the intent of the author or the sense/reference of a text or utterance--as a warrant for our evaluation or interpretation is to enter a vicious circularity in which we desperately try and always fail to catch our own tails. Since our lives are always incomplete, recursively structured narratives, and since no thing--not even our own 'self'--has a determinate location but is seen as fundamentally relational and hence unbounded, meaning cannot be seen as something inherent to any thought, word or deed. Instead, it can only be seen as the orient of our entire lives, as the unique and responsive fluency of our concrete daily experience--our karma, our world. As lived, meaning cannot in actuality either elude us or be grasped. It is what we are doing.[1]

Now, at least in its calculative dimension, it is language itself that makes things comprehendable--representing the unique and unbounded complexity of lived experience in terms of generic characteristics that make things manageable, that seal out the unexpected. It should come as no surprise, then, that whenever the prejudices of verbal discourse prevail, it will be assumed that meanings can be grasped--either by uncovering the intent of the person whose thoughts, words or deeds we hope to interpret, or by explicating the often complex and perhaps quite unintended conceptual content enfolded in the linguistic or behavioural-gestural structure by virtue of which meaning is thought to be conveyed. But by so abstracting lived experience, language necessarily opens up the need for interpretation, for deciding which of a polysemous term's connotations is to

be taken as relevant. At the very least, interpretation involves setting horizons for relevance.

As typically conceived in discourse, meaning is the 'nature' or 'essence' of a text or (set of) utterance(s). It is something inherent and hence contained--a kind of property which it is the business of communication to exchange and which the act of intepretation quite literally is taken to explicate or unfold. Deciding whether this has been done accurately and adequately--deciding, that is, whether we have arrived at true understanding--is then a matter of using the author/speaker's intent and the text/utterance itself as standards against which our interpretations are measured. A good interpretation maintains maximal continuity with the intent and context lying before and about the 'meaning' in question by discounting everything that works against the achievement of closure, of reaching calculative understanding. Far from being thought of as projections for which we are ultimately responsible, however, the horizons for relevance needed in order to be able to grasp the meaning of a text or utterance are thought to be in some sense inherent to those texts/utterances or established by reference to the author's intent.

Prior to Heidegger, establishing this continuity was seen as a relatively straightforward and finally accomplishable act--an excavation by means of which we eventually end up with meanings which are no longer merely inferred but firmly in hand. Among other things, Heidegger's work brought about a denial of the workability of appeals to authorial intent since it was discovered that this line of inquiry never leads us to a determinate source from which the text or utterance in question has flowed, but rather onto a cultural-historical field the horizons of which we can neither specify with any precision nor successfully overleap.[2] The by now almost canonical status of the "hermeneutical circle" is based on an acceptance if not a positive embrace of the inescapability of these circumstances. We can never specify a source for the text, but find

that not only is its origin irresolvably historical and hence indeterminate, the horizons for relevance which we must project in order to grasp any (discursive) meanings at all cannot be separated from our own activities as interpreters. While there are many versions of the hermeneutical circle and the subtleties differentiating them mark significant philosophical concerns, all of the existing versions insist on a denial of the adequacy of appeals to authorial intent in deciding what a text means. That is, they insist on what Ricoeur refers to as the "semantic autonomy of the text". And yet, since the field onto which we are directed in wondering about the adequacy of interpretation is fundamentally societal--a field of orientations to regularity, consistency, and the kinds of generic relations with others without which no closure is actually possible--the overwhelming tendency in contemporary hermeneutics has been to look to language or rather discourse itself as the source or locus of meaning.

In stark contrast to this, Ch'an exhorts us to cut off the route of language--to cut off grasping and the making of identity and difference upon which it intimately depends. Thus, Ma-tsu asks his students to forget his words if they want to understand him, and his great-grandson in the dharma, Lin-chi, is famous for proclaiming at the beginning of one of his talks that opening his mouth is already a mistake. The thrust of both of these remarks is, of course, that the meaning of any Buddhist teaching is not something contained in the sutras--in the Buddha's or anyone else's discourses--but in living itself, in the confluence of uninhibited interpersonality. The task of the present chapter is to articulate a consistently Buddhist response to the question, "What does this mean?"--in short, the narratively guided articulation of a truly concursive hermeneutics without which our inquiry regarding the sociality of Ch'an enlightenment would remain of at most a purely theoretical interest. Since the emphasis on the linguisticality of meaning in contemporary Western hermeneutics can plausibly be traced to Heidegger, let us begin

with a brief reflection on his understanding of language and the relationship of this understanding to the canonization of the hermeneutical circle.

A. Language and Understanding: The Identity of the Circumferance and the Center.

In his Introduction to Metaphysics, Heidegger explicitly rejects the Western tradition's conception of truth and knowledge and calls for our enacting a return, literally a revolution, to the original questions and insights of the pre-Socratics. Yet, it is arguable that Heidegger's way of construing understanding and in particular the function of language and *logos* in fact replicates rather than undermines the discursive presuppositions on the basis of which a schism was originally opened up between being and appearance, becoming, thought and the ought.

One of Heidegger's primary conclusions is, of course, that man's primordially authentic relation to Being was sundered through a process of degeneration that is essentially linguistic in nature. The various dichotomies that he fervently seeks to undermine--being/appearance, being/becoming, being/thought, being/ought--are all traced to an objectification of being and a corresponding subjectification of consciousness that have their origin in an impoverishment of *logos*. Man's original and unabashedly heroic and at times tragic task is, according to Heidegger, to wrest being from concealment in an act of sacred violence and bring it into the manifest as the essent (1959:160). In his terminology, this work is the making (*poiesis*) of truth (*aletheia*)--a work which is accomplished through language. He claims that "[p]ristine speech opens up the being of the essent in the structure of its collectedness" (1959:172), that "[i]t is in words and language that things first come into being and are." (1959:13) Indeed, "Being itself is

dependent on the word in a totally different and more fundamental sense than any essent." (1959:88) Like Adam in the Book of Genesis, Heidegger's creative man is a paradox--a part of nature that presides over nature, naming and bringing it into coherent wholeness. Thus, even though Man is an aspect of Being, it is upon his efforts and articulations that Being itself fundamentally depends. In perfect keeping with the conclusions toward which existentialism drives us, in returning thus to the problem of Being and its relation to language, Heidegger would have us realize that man (Dasein) is self-made.

Were it the case that Heidegger did not see man's role as that of a lone hero wresting Being out of concealment through poetic speech, it might be plausibly maintained that his views are more than superficially similar to those espoused in the Diamond Sutra. One might argue that especially in some versions of the Mahayana tradition, Buddha nature stands in roughly the same relationship to the things (*dharmas*) of phenomenal experience as Heidegger's Being does to the any given essent--that is, no things exist independently but arise only by virtue of our eliciting their appearance out of an originally indeterminate presence. However, and quite contrary to the way in which the Mahayana would see matters, it is clear that for Heidegger there is something independent and exalted about man's position in this scheme. Left to itself, Heideggerian Being would remain forever concealed, depending in a very literal sense on man for expression. In a word, Heidegger's Being--what we might in the most general sense call Nature--is mute, and perhaps deaf as well. In and of itself, it means nothing.

This stands in direct opposition to the lived intuitions of so called "primitive" cultures which share the Buddhist's sense that the rain, the striking of a tree by lightning, the phases of the moon or the premature birth of a child are all deeply meaningful--part of an ongoing conversation in which humans are in no way the sole or even primary sources of articulation. That is, from a narrative perspective, such occurances are not

mechanically explainable events exhaustively accounted for in terms of their precedents, but are related to as voices raised in a world-making concourse in which things physical and spiritual, things natural and human are not radically segregated but seen as aspects of a irreducible wholeness. Things are speaking to and with us even as we are speaking to them. That the sky has no name for itself or even for us does not in any way keep it from conversing, from turning with us, re-orienting, changing our conduct even as it changes its own.

To realize how disconnected we have become--how isolated in our specialness--we need only think of how hard it is to speak alone in the woods, how embarrassed we would be if anyone heard us talking to the trees or to the stream washing our feet with a touch as sensitive and silken as that of any lover. We think it is silly to talk when no one is listening. How unlike the birds we are, how unlike the crickets who every night add a new motif to the season's song, responding to the changes in the angle of the sun's rays, the length of the current drought, the mating of the squirrels and fruit rats.

Because we have exalted the forms of our speech, the dialects of our 'selves', and taken them as the paradigm of all speaking, we think Nature neither sings nor appreciates--is transformed by--what we say. Thus, Heidegger's man does not listen to nature even though he may propose to it as part of his job of drawing it out of hiding and into the light of rational consciousness. As in the worst of marriages, the relationship never deepens into full reciprocity. The self-appointed steward of the Earth, man dictates what is, has and will be. Unlike so many Ch'an and Zen masters, Heidegger could never allow the song of enlightenment to be sung by the bamboo and rocks.

Indeed, nowhere are the centrist presuppositions of Heidegger's existential individualism more pronounced than in his reading of the relationship obtaining among language, humans and nature. In very brief, it is Heidegger's conviction that the true

relation of man and Being is mediated by a language that is poetic, and that it is precisely the collapse of *logos* as gathering into *logos* as discourse which signals the degeneration of our authentic relation to Being. Since Heidegger's original *logos* is opposed to mundane discourse because the latter levels us down--because its movement is societal--we might anticipate that his "gathering" would represent a turn toward the spontaneity of freely improvised relations with others or what we have referred to as concourse. That this is not in fact the case is evident in Heidegger's insistence that poetic language originates not in the context of joint improvisation--in the direct, face-to-face, hand-to-hand engagement of co-creators--but rather in the tragically charged relationship of each unique individual and Being itself. The practice of poetry is in this sense a non-conversive art--a fundamentally private relation between the poet and an other which is either generically human or simply Being as such. Poetry is thus essentially a writing or inscription of being--an expression of the self, of one's authentic being-there (*dasein*)--and not an immediate co-ordinating of conduct and value within a present, human community.

And so from a Buddhist perspective, while Heidegger may rightly deny that the primary function of *logos* is description or proposition, his reading of authentic gathering (*logos*) as the act of a individual who "casts aside all help" (1959:163) can only be seen as indicating an abiding and improper allegiance to the root presuppositions of an objectifying mode of relating to one's world--presuppositions of which Heidegger is otherwise most deeply critical. That he prefers inscription to description is a trivial distinction in light of his violent subordination of the properly concursive dimension of language. For Heidegger, the authentic and original function of language is not the profoundly transformative realization of concourse--gathering in a social and not a societal sense--but articulation. It is not in the conduct of conversation that meaning and

language are first constituted, but in utterance. As in the Book of Genesis, the world of beings first comes into being with the utterance of the Words, "let there be...." (Genesis 1.2ff)

The later hermeneutic tradition has done little to amend Heidegger on this point. For example, in the recent work of Jurgen Habermas, which in other respects seems committed to the communal nature of at least the process of coming to an understanding, the allegiance to this view is so unswerving that he identifies locution as the primary act of language and relegates the perlocutionary act--that act by means of which we attempt to bring about a meaningful change in the responses of a partner in conversation--to a purely secondary function. (1981:286ff) In the same vein, Ricoeur claims that the basic unit of discourse is the sentence (1982:148), unavoidably (at least in any hermeneutical system where meaning is seen as a conceptual content and not as conduct itself) implying thereby that the basic unit of meaning is located in utterance. That is, meaning does not originally appear in the irreducibly polythetic context of an ongoing conversation--a play of calling and responding and responding in return--but rather in identifiable acts of articulation.

Ricoeur's admission of the presence of illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions of meaning does very little to mitigate this location of meaning in utterance. Regarding the locutionary act, Ricoeur states that it exteriorizes itself in a sentence which can be identified and re-identified as the same. "A sentence becomes an utterance and thus is transferred to others as being such-and-such a sentence with such-and-such a meaning." (1982:199) Meaning thus inheres to the speech-act, the utterance, and must be seen as something with an abiding identity capable of being 'communicated'--that is, conveyed or transmitted in verbal discourse. The full meaning of the speech-act may include more than the narrowly construed propositional act, but "only insofar as these

three aspects of the speech-act (the illocutionary, the perlocutionary, and the locutionary) are codified, gathered into paradigms, and where, consequently, they can be identified and re-identified as having the same meaning." (1982:200) Granted that for Ricoeur any "action has the structure of a locutionary act," and thus has a propositional content which can be "identified and re-identified as the same," (1982:204) there can be no doubt that the meaning of perlocutionary acts is of the same form and finally just as plainly linguistic as those of locution. Thus grounded in the nature of utterance, meaning is as individual, private and yet (confoundingly) typical in Ricoeur as it is in Heidegger.

Among the many questions raised by Heidegger's manner of bringing the ontological nature of understanding into consideration, the most important for our present purposes are: first, whether the individualism endemic to existentialism is capable of any sort of rational warrant or if it is necessarily axiomatic in nature--an ontological prejudice; and, secondly, whether understanding can ever carry us beyond what our languages (our 'selves') have gathered--whether we can truly understand more than what can be said.

Whatever our final disposition is regarding such questions in Heidegger's thought, it is clear that Western hermeneutics has wholeheartedly accepted in the wake of Being and Time that understanding, ontology and language form an unbreachable trinity. To ask how we arrive at understanding, how we are better able to conduct our interpretations, is from Heidegger onward a wholly linguistic question.

This is not to suggest, of course, that the individualism entailed by Heidegger's analysis has not been contested by subsequent theorists in the hermeneutical tradition. Indeed, Gadamer's modification of the hermeneutical circle--the inextricable co-presence of prejudice and critical reflection--is arguably a corrective to just this tendency in Heidegger's thought. But in all the differences marked between Heidegger and his heirs,

the exclusive marriage of language and understanding remains uncontested. Thus, in response to Derrida's trenchant arguments for the irremedial linguisticality of all experience, the best that Gadamer, Ricoeur and company can manage is an appeal to metaphor as a means of creatively extending the horizons of language. Derrida's point stands, and the circularity of the process of understanding is insured as unavoidable--an insurance which, in a merely apparent paradox, allows for much deeper sleep in an age where the correspondence of thought and reality has come to be seen as unprovable. Thus, even for Derrida, the final result is not, as with the Taoist, to "discard knowledge and abandon the self." Rather, it is to recognize that the deconstruction of our linguistic sedimentations itself depends on those very sedimentations. Language is irrevocable.

In his introduction to a collection of Gadamer's essays, David Linge sums up this bias in a very telling manner. He writes, "Understanding as a fusion of horizons is essentially a *linguistic* process; indeed, these two--language and the understanding of transmitted meaning--are not two processes, but are affirmed by Gadamer as one and the same." (1976:xxviii) I have bothered to quote Linge not only because what is true of Gadamer here is true as well of all the voices raised on behalf of the hermeneutical circle, but because his wording provides a most fortuitous inversion of the basic tenets of the sort of hermeneutics operational in Buddhism from at least the time of Nagarjuna through the golden age of Ch'an. There, the aim of understanding is never a fusing of horizons, but the much more radical endeavor to relinquish all horizons/views, and meaning, far from being held literally transmissable, is explicitly held to occur beyond words and letters. The temptation to dismiss such contrary manners of conceiving understanding and meaning as patently misguided (if not manifestly unintelligible) would be, of course, to commit the Kantian fallacy of taking our own organization of thought and experience as

universal--a fallacy which, given the vast body of anthropological data to the contrary, is thankfully ever more difficult to see as anything other than what it is.

No doubt it will be objected that the intensely historical spirit of contemporary hermeneutics explicitly eschews the appeal to any such fixed, trans-cultural laws or categories of thought. That may well be. All the same, I would contend that the very inescapability of the hermeneutic circle (in whichever of its variations) is indication of something suspiciously fixed and indubitable at the core of an apparently committed historicality and that the onus for the commission of the fallacy lies precisely in the axiomatic belief that understanding is an essentially linguistic activity. Indeed, I would propose that the center of the hermeneutic circle is nothing other than the presupposition that understanding is linguistic--a presupposition that is itself tied to the epistemic sanctity of the notion that knower and known are not interdependent in anything but an accidental fashion.

From the perspective of Buddhism (especially the Mahayana), this constitutes an error of titanic proportions. To claim that "things" are fundamentally linguistic entities in origin and texture, that they amount to designative projections of value, is for the Buddhist unproblematic. As we have already indicated, the Diamond Sutra is in part dedicated to driving home this very point. What is troublesome is the restriction of understanding--and ultimately all experience--to the sphere of the linguistic and the imputation that meaning is in some sense contained in or conveyed by utterance. If this were the case, in approaching the sutras, for example, we would have recourse only to those hermeneutical techniques prescribed by and hence compatible with the limits of our language and prior experience. This, the Buddhist hermeneuticist explicitly denies, at least in part because the dependent co-origination (*pratitya-samutpada*) of all things disallows such an individualist connotation of understanding, just as it disallows a

dichotomy of knower and known. But more importantly, the Buddhist hermeneuticist also insists that no interpretation which proceeds solely on the grounds of appeals to tradition and critical reflection--both essentially linguistic activities--can be considered complete.

By the time of Ch'an, a tradition within Buddhism priding itself on being a lineage outside of words and letters, a student asking for an explanation or interpretation of a difficult scriptural passage or point of doctrine is likely to be rudely jerked back into the present--by a shout, a blow, a peremptory gesture, or a pointedly non-philosophical question--and then asked, "At this very moment, what is your mind?" If the student persists, asking "what is mind? what is the present?", the response of the teacher is virtually always a suggestion that the student return to his/her practice. Far from being peculiar to Ch'an, the suggestion that meditative practice is crucial to our understanding of a text and the realization of its meaning is found in all forms of Buddhism. But before we can reasonably expect to make sense of such a suggestion, it is necessary for us to arrive at construals of meaning and understanding that are not in fundamental conflict with the Buddhist experience of being human.

B. Understanding as Relinquishing: The Hermeneutics of Emptiness.

1. *Meaning and the Fruit of Practice.*

In his paper, "Textual Interpretation in Buddhism" (1988), Etienne Lamotte undertakes an examination of the *Catuḥpratisaraṇasūtra* with the aim of bringing to light the means by which the early Buddhist tradition undertook to evaluate and guide interpretation. As the system developed in the sutra sheds considerable light on the status of meaning within Buddhist hermeneutics, I would like to discuss it in some detail.

In brief, the *CPS* proposes that there are four refuges (*pratisaraṇa*) or guidelines of interpretation: the dharma, not the person; the meaning (*artha*) and not the letter (*vyanjana*); the sutra of precise meaning (*nītārtha*), not that the meaning of which requires interpretation (*neyārtha*); and lastly, realization (*jñāna*), not discursive consciousness (*vijñāna*). As shall become apparent, these four taken together form a system of hermeneutics, not just a collection of pointers or rules of thumb. Most importantly in terms of its contrast with Western models for the evaluation of interpretation, the successful functioning of this system depends on meditative practice.

The first refuge instructs us to appeal not to the identity of the author (the Buddha) who ostensibly composed the work in assessing its authenticity, but rather to its compatability first with the teachings already present in the Canon and secondly with our own reasoning on and experience of the matters treated. That is, the first refuge or criterion offered for determining a "good" interpretation rests primarily on the authority of the tradition and is supplemented by our personal reasoning.

The second refuge is used in situations where the significance of a canonical passage/text is in question because of the presence of an uncommon (but not necessarily unclear or obscure) expression. Here, we are directed to give precedence to the meaning (*artha*) of the passage/text, not its particular formulation or expression. While the significance of the Four Noble Truths does not vary, for example, the Buddha used quite a variety of expressions to assist his listeners in realising their meaning. Not being attached to any particular phrasing--getting bogged down in what is said--is thus crucial to properly articulating the meaning of a text.

The third refuge comes into play when two or more texts (typically already present in the Canon) are found to attribute apparently incompatible teachings to the Buddha. The distinction between *nītārtha* and *neyārtha* sutras is thus meant to insure the

continued integrity and consistency of the Canon as a whole. Determining to which category a sutra belongs pivots on the distinction of sutras whose meaning is clear and precise and those the meaning of which needs to be 'inferred' since they are intentional (*ābhiprāyika*)--composed with a particular motivation (*paryāyadeśita*). The latter category comprises those texts which evidence the exercise of "skillful means" (*upāya*): the ability to creatively and effectively adapt one's methods of communication to coincide with the particular needs and dispositions of the listener. It is hardly avoidable, given this criterion for distinction, that the determination of which texts are *nitartha* and which are *neyartha* will be almost entirely a function of one's own particular needs, dispositions and accomplishments in the dharma. As Lamotte notes, "The subjective nature of this criterion is immediately apparent and explains the frequent disagreement between scholars: each school tends to take literally the doctrinal texts which conform to its theses and to consider those which cause dilemmas as being of provisional meaning." (1988:19) Far from the sort of objective criteria sought by hermeneuticists like Emilio Betti (1965), the third refuge seems to move us well in the direction of the Gadamerian emphasis on appropriation. However, and for reasons quite germane to our present concerns, it is advisable to exercise caution in claiming such a parallelism.

In approaching the sutras of provisional meaning, the interpreter is instructed to do so in light of the sutras of precise meaning, advice which entails orienting oneself in terms of the meaning of the text, not its letter. In the *Bodhisattvabhumi*, there is a commentary on the third refuge in which it is stated that, "The bodhisattva who resorts to the meaning and not to the letter penetrates all the enigmatic words of the Bhagavat Buddhas." (*Bodhisattvabhumi* 108) But if the meaning is, for us, still hidden in the text--hence our classifying it as *neyārtha*--the suggestion that we resort to the evaluative distinction in terms of which the second refuge is articulated would seem to be

particularly empty advice. How can we appeal to the meaning of the text if it is not, at least at the moment, 'clear and precise'?

Making sense out of this reversion to the second refuge can be initiated by noting that the term translated here as "meaning"--*artha*--has the literal sense of "fruit" or "welfare", something that is realized after long and continuous effort and which is at once a source of nourishment for others and a means of insuring the continuation of a particular developmental theme. Meaning is, in this sense, the cyclic (and hence ongoing) culmination or leading edge of a process of growth. Equally as important and unlike the English word "meaning," *artha* does not carry the connotation of being something intrinsic to an utterance or something either subjectively gleaned from or placed within a text or event, but marks instead a necessarily public embodiment or enactment. Interestingly, the species of 'meaning' which has long flourished in the Western tradition derives from the Indo-european root, *man*--"to intend," "to think"--from which come the English words "man," "mind," and "mental" as well as the Sanskrit *manas* or "mind." the sixth (mental) sense-consciousness in Buddhist psychology. As the fourth refuge will make quite evident, the implicit dissociation of meaning and mentality indicated by the choice of the term *artha* is absolutely crucial to understanding the thrust of a properly Buddhist hermeneutics.

But first an interjection. It might well be asked if we ought not to look at the recent and unilateral efforts in Western hermeneutics to free the meaning of a text from authorial intent as an attempt to at least partially redress the complications brought about by the prejudice that meaning and mentality are inextricably bound to one another. In other words, doesn't this effort suggest that Gadamer and company are already well in motion toward a construal of meaning more in line with *artha* than with *man*? I think not. Gadamer's suggestion, for instance, that "meaning is always a direction of meaning" does

prohibit the sort of finality usually associated with meaning construed under the aegis of intention. But he goes on--in full keeping with the Heideggerian prejudices regarding the relation of *logos* and understanding--to state that one's task in understanding is to place him/herself in the direction of what is being said in order to continue developing in that direction in one's own saying. (1976:68) As Ricoeur insists, "to interpret is to follow the path of thought opened up by the text, to place oneself *en route* toward the *orient* of the text." (1982:162) Thus, meaning may be liberated from intention, but not from the horizons of the linguistic and the seductive luminosity of all things mental. That these latter forms of liberation are profoundly implied in the construal of meaning as *artha* is the central import of the fourth refuge.

Once again, there is a telling commentary in the *Bodhisattvabhumi*. In a discussion of the fourth refuge it is stated that discursive consciousness (*vijñāna*) is capable only of generating knowledge of the letter while meaning is attained only by *jnana* (BB 257). *Vijñāna* has the literal sense of "dividing (*vi*) knowledge/realization (*jñāna*)" and is held to be derived on the basis of either listening (*śruti*)--generally referring to a resort to traditional authority--and reflecting (*cintā*)--which pertains to both inference and speculation. Knowledge of the letter, then, is a function of precisely the range of concerns/methods accepted by the Western hermeneutical tradition. According to the *CPS*, however, the realization of meaning is not a mental process, but rather a function of *bhāvanā*, practice.[3] Insofar as the meaning of the text is held to be absent so long as one is restricted to appeals to authority and critical reflection, Lamotte correctly and emphatically concludes that it is practice that "constitutes the single and indispensible instrument of true exegesis." (1988:27) But if meaning is the fruit of practice and does not amount to either a matter of authorial intention or a direction of thought, what is it? If

it is not linguistic in nature and is not, therefore, to be located in cognition, where does it occur?

The short answer to both questions is conduct. The long answer is phrased as succinctly as possible by Pai-chang Huai-hai in his response to a student asking him the meaning of a difficult passage in the sutras. "Take up words in order to manifest meaning and you'll obtain 'meaning'. Cut off words and meaning is emptiness. Emptiness is the Tao. The Tao is cutting off words and speech." (HTC 119:423c) In interpreting this passage, it is first of all essential that we appreciate the rich polysemy of the term "tao." In general, the term functions both as a noun--in the sense of a path, a way, a manner, a method, and as a verb--in the sense of blazing a trail, proceeding in a certain way. In Chinese Buddhism, Tao is also used to denote the Buddhist Path or Way (Skrt: *marga*) as well as the fruit resulting from its practice. That is, Tao connotes both the Noble Eightfold Path and the enlightenment which it allows to be realized.

Without entering into an extensive analysis of either of these connotations, it is crucial to note that the Eightfold Path--right view, right intention, right speech, right discipline, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation[4]--is a part of the Four Noble Truths (the most basic formulation of the Buddha's teaching) and, at the same time, contains those Four Noble Truths as a whole (in right view). On the one hand, this recursion implies that the Buddhist notion of truth (*sat*) is inseparable from practice and that understanding cannot, therefore, be considered a purely cognitive matter. On the other hand, it suggests that truth cannot be abstracted from conduct. Thus, truth (*sat*) is never opposed to non-truth (*asat*) in Buddhist doctrine, but to confusion (*musa*) and ignorance (*āvidya*, literally not-seeing, not-attending). As such, a truth ought not to be conceived of as a correct proposition about some state of affairs, but as

immediate correcting--the resolution of some confusion or ignorance-originated crisis. Understanding, in this sense, is a response.

In saying that meaning is emptiness and that emptiness is itself the Tao, Pai-chang is effectively defining meaning as the fruit of responding through the practice of emptiness. In order to begin fully appreciating the subtlety of this definition, it is crucial that we come to an at least rudimentary understanding of the role of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in the Buddhist tradition. Insofar as Pai-chang's suggestion that emptiness is the Tao is an allusion to one of the key phrases in Nagarjuna's *Mūlamadhyamikakakārikā*, it is to that work that we shall divert.

2. *Emptiness as the Relinquishing of Horizons for Relevance.*

Nagarjuna defines emptiness as the relinquishing of all views (*dṛṣṭi*) (MK 13.8), in the context of which there are no horizons for relevance and, hence, for inquiry and integration (MK 24.14).[5] Emptiness, he claims, is not a substance, the transcendental ground of being, a void out of which all things come. Rather it is dependent origination itself. It is the Middle Path--the way between declarations of "is" and "is-not" to the resolution of all crisis, the end of suffering (*duḥkha*).

In the Buddhist tradition, the term "views" is variously used in a manner equivalent to our own "standpoints", "theories", "interpretations" or "opinions", and in general connotes a conceptual or verbal expression of and/or perspective on the way things are or have come to be. Views are conceptually mediated, mental constructs about the perceived--constructs which inevitably distort not so much the way things are (since in Buddhism the ontological status of being is denied) but rather our ways of conducting ourselves toward and among them. Thus, the *Aṭṭakavagga*--one of the oldest Buddhist texts--states that, "The wise one...has got rid of the three poisons (ignorance, hatred and greed) and he does not enter the mud of conceptual thinking." (Sn 535) So thorough is the

Buddhist critique of the structure (and not merely the content) of having views that even the Buddha's teachings (*samma-dṛṣṭi*) are likened to a raft which must be discarded once it has served its purpose.

According to the early tradition, views are seen as deriving from a commitment to opposite-thinking, the tendency to see things in terms of basic dichotomies of which is/is-not is the most virulent. Confusion and ignorance arise on the basis of the sedimentation of these distinctions/identifications--what in early Buddhism are referred to as *saṃskāras*, literally impulses or dispositions (with respect to speaking, thinking and acting).

It is hardly surprising, then, that Nagarjuna claims that, "When ignorance ceases, there is no occurrence of dispositions." What is of paramount importance for understanding the operation of a consistently Buddhist hermeneutical system is that Nagarjuna immediately goes on to remark that "...the cessation of that ignorance takes place as a result of the practice (*bhāvanā*) of that [non-occurrence] through wisdom." (MK 26.11) This *practice* of the non-occurrence of dispositions is nothing other than the ongoing process of relinquishing of all discriminating boundaries as they arise--in short, the practice of emptiness. To view things discriminatively--that is, under the rubric of discourse and not concourse--is to set limits or horizons for relevance, to disregard some level of the interdependence of all 'things' and therefore to circumscribe a range of possible and acceptable responses to what has been discriminated. In the context of Buddhist metaphysics, the only consistent notion of being--the determination of "what is"--amounts to such a projection of horizons for relevance, a setting of limits to inquiry not without parallels to Schutz's concept of horizons for explication. When such limits become fixed, action (*karma*) is said to be defiled or productive of ill; a situation correctable only through practice (MK 17.15).

As Pai-chang's association of emptiness and cutting off words and speech makes clear, the root cause of this fixation is to be found in discourse--in that "flowing apart" by means of which 'this' and 'that', 'self' and 'other' are abstracted from the living flux of interdependence and frozen into self-identical, enduring entities. With the invention of such entities (*dharmas*), we experience a transformation (and often a narrowing) of the scope of our improvisations--on the one hand a reduction of understanding to what can be (monothetically) grasped, and on the other hand a channeling of our conduct along lines dictated by the divisions we have made. And just as the transition from hand tools to power tools marked a general shift away from finished character as the primary criterion for excellence in the building trades to quantity or speed of production, the invention of a new vocabulary--of a new or more highly refined set of distinctions--always brings about a new way of communal life, the establishment of a new set of conventions.[6]

That language is conventional in nature and that no word or words have an intrinsic correspondance with an independent reality is crucial to the complexion of Buddhist hermeneutics. In fact, there is not one, but three terms repeatedly used in Canonical discussions of language that are typically translated by the English "convention": *saṃvṛti, prajñapti,* and *vyavahāra*. All three words refer specifically to forms of conduct (including in Buddhism mental and verbal conflict) which originate in the concrete ways in which members of a given community come to interact in a co-ordinated fashion. In this sense, conventions do not necessarily and certainly do not primarily depend on any sort of conscious, conceptually mediated agreement. Rather, they are 'institutionalized' or public strategies for coping with forces (both internal and external) tending toward the disruption of the community. Language can be seen, then, as embodying what might be referred to as cultural *saṃskāra*--dispositions to act habitually or impulsively--and the injunction to "cut off words" understood as a call to move beyond

merely reacting on the basis of our dispositions and instead to fully and sensitively respond to the situation in which we find ourselves. In the Ch'an tradition, this is encapsulated in the phrase, *sui shih, ying yung*: "according with the situation, responding as needed". True understanding--the practice of wisdom (*prajñā*)--far from involving the grasp of abiding standards or justified beliefs, therefore entails stepping outside of the circle of the linguistic in order to once again participate fully and immediately in the world-creating vitality of concursive improvisation.

As noted earlier, in his discussion of the hermeneutical conundrums presented by early Taoist texts, Hansen (1981) comes to a very similar conclusion regarding the conventionality of language. Taking as his starting point Lao-tzu's iconoclastic injunction to "discard knowledge, abandon the self" (*ch'i chih ch'u chi*), Hansen notes that no progress in understanding this phrase and its place in the text as a whole can be made without first coming to grips with what is entailed by the term "knowledge." On largely philological grounds, he makes the case that while the prevailing Western conception of knowledge is related to states of belief propositionally represented by sentences of the general form "I know that...", the Chinese conception of knowledge involves no appeal to beliefs and takes the form of "knowing to...." More succinctly, the contrast is between a focus on epistemic states and epistemic activities. In the Chinese context, and (I would posit) within the Buddhist tradition, "knowledge of things is the ability to conform to the community's practices of discriminating things" (1981:325), and epistemic activities are best seen as "conventionally generated and shaped responses of persons." (1981:326) The Taoist injunction to "discard knowledge" and Pai-chang's injunction to "cut off words" both amount to a call for relinquishing those conventionally constituted horizons for responsive conduct embodied in the linguistic medium supporting the vast majority of our social interactions and cultural endeavors.

It is only in light of such an understanding of the role of language that it is possible to appreciate the Ch'an master Ma-tsu's insistence that his students neither record nor remember any of his talks:

> Even if I were to explain as many principles of the attainment of the Tao as there are grains of sand in a river, your minds would still not be augmented in the least....Even if you talk about the Tathagata's expedient teachings for as many aeons as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, you'd still never complete your explanations and they would be like unsevered barbs and chains. (TTC 45:406c)

The meaning of the teachings is not a function of language, but of one's own conduct. Hence the adamant assertion in Ch'an that a master has nothing to transmit to his/her students. The point of their teachings was not to inculcate a form of thinking or to point out a direction for thought, but to bring about a resonance or coordination of conduct between master (the enlightened person) and student. Meaning is not, as in the western hermeneutical tradition a 'direction of thought', but rather a change in the vector of our conduct. It is the creative and yet skillfully appropriate response to a partner in concourse.[7]

If knowledge and meaning are construed along such lines, the aim of hermeneutics is best seen as the cultivation of an ever-increasing sensitivity and flexibility in our responses to others--whether human or not--and the challenges they present for our narration. Far from marking the closure of the hermeneutic circle, understanding cannot amount to an act of appropriation or taking possession, but rather consists in the enactment of integration through letting go--the practice of relinquishing.

C. Universality and the Hermeneutics of Release.

Of course, if meaning is given in response, it cannot reasonably be limited to the range covered by cognitive and verbal behaviour. In the context of the sort of fully relational ontology developed within the Buddhist tradition and arguably reaching a

philosophical apex in the work of Nagarjuna, such a limitation would amount to nothing more than a projection of values which reveals much more about who is making the limitation than what is ostensibly limited.

In the Buddhist tradition, behaviour is for heuristic reasons divided into three types--mental, verbal and bodily--and the meaning of any given act is on any of these three dimensions considered to be necessarily open-ended even if the sort of dispositions brought to bear by any particular interpreter will necessarily place constraints on our presently realized range of meaning. As the fourth refuge suggested by the *CPS* makes perfectly evident, in situations where the meaning of a text is not clear, appeals to authority and the application of critical reflection cannot help. At best they can serve to bring about a more astute apprehension of the sense of text. Without practice, one is only in a position to respond (and often merely to react) on the basis of one's current level of comprehension and hence on those dispositions to conduct that have become sedimented--both individually and culturally--over the course of not just one, but many lifetimes. Like Gadamer, then, the Buddhist hermeneuticist acknowledges the inescapable influence of tradition in any interpretative act. Where the Buddhist differs is in the provision of a set of concrete practices which serve to dissolve the inescapability and compulsoriness of that influence.

As the discussion of Nagarjuna's identification of emptiness and the middle path suggested, it is our dispositions to perceive, think, speak and act in certain habitual or compulsive ways that lie at the root of all suffering or imbalance (*duḥkha*). These dispositions cannot be correctively adjusted or dissolved in anything but an accidental fashion by what we 'know'. Knowledge, in the sense of an apprehension of states of affairs, depends upon the projection of horizons for relevance without which comprehension--the prehensive determination of 'what is' the case--is impossible, and

these horizons are themselves an exteriorization of the very dispositions which we hope knowledge will help to eliminate or mitigate. Part of the failure of Freudian therapy, for all its insightfulness, lies precisely in its foundational reliance on the method of bringing about an awareness of the sources of the analysand's psychological or social dis-ease. The mere knowledge that such and such an event in the second or third year of life brought about a deformation of the personality structure the effects of which have become only more pronounced with age can, by itself, do nothing to alter those patterns of now ill-adapted behaviour. Indeed, where psychoanalysis does work, it is arguably less a result of what the patient has learned about his or her early life and its relation to present circumstances than of the process of interacting with the therapist--that is, of the progressive, candid and necessarily improvised sets of responses that for many people are unfortunately possible only in the context of something like the therapeutic session.

Given the denial of anything but a heuristic distinction between the various modes or dimensions of behaviour, one of the profound advantages of associating meaning with responsive conduct--and not with either intention or a linguistically-defined moment of appropriation--is that it becomes incumbent upon us in any act of authentic understanding to actively heal the deep schism typically separating what we know and what we do. Much of the best philosophical thinking in the Western tradition has been geared to providing adequate standards and methods for properly translating knowledge into action, for providing a positive, rationally evolving linkage between the epistemic (perceptive/receptive/experiential) and behavioural (motor/responsive/unconscious) sides of our nature. But such schemes for the mitigation of the schism ultimately serve only to insure its continued reproduction since they remain grounded on the presupposition that knowing and behaving are in some important sense different and distinct.

Without first fully acknowledging that acts of perception and knowing and that which is perceived and known are aspects of a single, dynamic and completely reciprocal relationship--a violation of one of the most sacred of our epistemic canons--the rift between knowing and doing, between the intellect and the will, is unbridgeable. In the Buddhist context, the teaching of karma is intended at the very least to undermine this canon and all that follows from it, providing a framework within which it is possible to realize that our responsibility has no limits--that the world in which we live is not only one we have chosen, but that it should ultimately be seen as who we are. In this light, it is quite reasonable that Nagarjuna and others would claim that karma is relinquished only through practice and never merely through the acquisition of some new view. It is only on the basis of continuous practice that habitual identifications and differentiations can be effectively eschewed, and our readiness to respond correctively in any situation whatever positively increased.

Perhaps the closest parallel in the Western tradition to such a "therapeutic" hermeneutics--a hermeneutics of release--is to be found in the work of Jurgen Habermas. His concern for the emancipation of the inquirer and interpreter from any coercive forces and his deep commitment to the critique of ideology bear not merely superficial resemblances to Buddhist hermeneutics. However, Habermas is concerned first and foremost with realising conditions within which propositionally mediated agreement can be attained in a community of inquiry, and his theory of communicative action is grounded on the absolute priority of linguistic acts aimed at bringing about, not the practical and concursive co-ordination of conduct and hence systems of value, but rather a decidedly discursive form of understanding. Thus, while the critique of ideology resembles the Buddhists injunction to relinquish all views, in its critical spirit it remains committed to the generation of new and ever better views. Such a hermeneutical scheme

falls under the category of what Nagarjuna describes as *saṃvṛti* or conventional truth, not *paramārtha* or "the ultimate meaning/fruit". That is to say, Habermas' critique simply inculcates new views on the basis of those biases to conduct already present and sedimented in our language. These views may effectively correct those which have hitherto prevailed, but they are views nonetheless. In the end, Habermas fails to break through the horizon of linguisticality and remains, as his critics are very quick to point out, well within the hermeneutic circle. In short, he fails to take advantage of the fourth refuge.

Now, granted the characterization of a properly Buddhist hermeneutics as one founded on a construal of understanding as a process of the practice-dependent release of difference and identity, it may be asked whether such a hermeneutics is not idiosyncratic to texts produced within a specific, soteriological context. Can the hermeneutics of emptiness effectively assist in the interpretation of juridical, historical or aesthetic texts/events? Moreover, can such a hermeneutics claim universality not only in the sense of a general applicability to all areas of human inquiry, but in that of providing a basis for establishing rationally defensible standards for the comparative evaluation of competing interpretations? In the absence of such established standards, does a Buddhist hermeneutics amount to a form of free improvisation which invites us to participate in the most pernicious forms of relativism?

While a full response to these questions is unfortunately the task of a separate paper, at least the following observations seem to be in order. To begin with, it follows from what has been said that while Buddhist hermeneutics agrees with Western hermeneutics in disallowing the identification of the meaning of a text/event with the intentions of its author(s), it also (and in the most radical sense) disallows the independence or autonony of any text/event. In a word, there is no enduring entity to

which we can intelligibly refer as a text or event without first projecting some horizons for relevance, the absence of which makes any act of identification or differentiation impossible. Insofar as narrative understanding is a relinquishing of such horizons in a meaningful--that is, responsive--way, the interpretative act in a quite literal sense both effects and correctively affects what is taken as the interpreted. It may well be that such a construal of the basis for authentic acts of interpretation is crucial only in dealing with texts/events intended to function as catalysts in the realization of emptiness as earlier defined. But as the critical hermeneutics of Habermas suggests, there is no reason why a hermeneutics aimed at correcting both interpreter and interpreted cannot be coherently applied to juridical, historical, scientific, or aesthetic texts. Nevertheless, it must be admitted, that the advantages of seeing meaning in terms of response and understanding in terms of releasing rather than appropriating may not be readily apparent in the context of interpreting case law, the massacre at Mi Lai, or a performance of "Rite of Spring". This, however, does not strike me as ultimately damaging to the acceptance of Buddhist hermeneutics as a legitimate alternative to the tradition stemming from Heidegger. I would suggest, rather, that the relationship between these two hermeneutical systems is analogous to that obtaining between quantum and classical mechanics. In the vast middle ground of physical inquiry, the two systems yield fully commensurable results. It is only in the exceptional cases, the liminal experiences and experiments, that the claims about the superiority of one over the other are at all warranted.

Regarding the problem of relativism and the desire for rationally justified standards of evaluation, it must be noted that both are unintelligible in the absence of a conception of reality as something independent of and unaffected by our acts of knowing. The Buddhist--like the quantum mechanic--quite explicitly rejects this conception and the ontology of identity and difference on which it is based, and insists instead on the

complete interdependence of all that comes to be. In conjunction with the denial of the intelligibility of the concept of 'the beginning' (of an event, a causal sequence, a person, the universe), one of the immediate implications of the interdependence or co-origination of all things is the impossibility of predicting in detail either what will come to be or what represents the best course of action to take under current circumstances. Necessarily, the Western preoccupation with certainty and fixed (or even rationally evolving) standards of evaluation is foreign to the Buddhist tradition and is replaced instead by a commitment to increasingly flexible and (in the sense implied within general systems theory) improbable responses to situations in the interest of bringing about a maximal integration of all the elements involved. In such a context, a relativist who holds that all views are incommensurable and closed to critical review from 'without' can only appear as a pouting absolutist.

Moreover, in a tradition eschewing the fundamental opposition of being and non-being and hence of true and false, rhetoric does not run counter to authentic epistemic ends as it has appeared to do in the West at least since the time of Plato. Instead, rhetoric is seen as the wholly positive art of bringing about true (i.e. corrective) understanding--that is, a practice which brings about a situationally sensitive, responsive co-ordination of the members of a given community. Proceeding completely on the basis of improvised (that is, unprecedented and yet profoundly responsive) conduct, and not on appeals to set standards of any sort, rhetoric is in this sense a 'secular' version of the social practice of emptiness which, like the Confucian sage, never aims at agreement, but only at realising harmony.[8]

The demise of rhetoric in ancient Greece as a legitimate mode of generating truth (and not merely as the art of presenting positions with often ulterior motives) would seem, then, to mark a watershed in the development of Western thought.[9] Heidegger

undoubtably saw this with particular clarity and so his suggested revolution--a return to the insights of the pre-Socratics. Yet, for all his perspicuity, Heidegger seems to have repudiated the branch without digging up the roots. In consequence, his own understanding of *logos* as 'gathering' not only does not reinstate the positive evaluation of rhetoric which was arguably prevalent in and crucial to the thought of pre-Socratic Greece, but goes to the other extreme of identifying the most authentic use of language not as communication, but as the poetic disclosure of being. It may well be that Heidegger recognized the inherent inadequacy of any view of communication based on the model of a successful transfer of information, but he does not develop anything like a conception of communication as the co-ordination of conduct through (in a fully narrative sense of the term) understanding. Thus, in spite of various kinds of appeal to the importance of dialogue by writers like Gadamer, Habermas and Ricoeur, the most authentic uses of language are still tied to locution--the act of speaking as isolated from listening--and the meaning of a communicative act is accordingly seen as a function of individual utterance or inscription, not conversation.[10] Discourse--the flow into identity and difference, into singularity and plurality, by means of which 'you' and 'I' first come about as individuals with our own 'meanings', our own separate lives--is unaccountably presumed basic.

Ch'an Buddhism's claim is that the adherence to such a paradigm for the structure of interpersonality should be recognized as the root of all privation--a retreat from sociality which leads to maintaining the illusion of a real and abiding ego, to prohibiting truly spontaneous concourse, and eventually to a willing subjection to and not a joyous use of our karma. If we are given only as narration--that is, if we are not are not the seemingly continuous and autonomous center of private experience, but an indeterminate vibrancy which includes all the characters, places and potentials presented as our life--

saying that meaning cannot be grasped but only lived is to say that meanings are always **ours**. As long as we remain committed to the presuppositions of calculative discourse, your meaning will remain a mystery to me, whether actually or potentially--something I would like to obtain or comprehend but which I very well may not. But when the paradigm of communication is seen as concourse, meaning is not something we exchange or acquire, but the quality of our joint improvisation--something that arises **between and never in** either 'you' or 'me'. Meaning is thus irreducibly interpersonal.

The question that must be asked of Ch'an, of course, is how this is realized--not just assented to on an intellectual level since that is itself the outcome or evidence of grasping, but actually embodied in our day-to-day conduct. How are we to break through the horizon delimiting both the subjective and the objective and realize, for example, that the meaning of the Heart Sutra does not lie in the text or in the Buddha's intentions or even in what we appropriate from it, but is simply the enlightening tenor of our own life-narrative with all of its unexpected twists and turns?

Ch'an's answer is on the face of it quite simple: practice. But what is does this mean? How does Ch'an practice differ from any other form of conduct? Granted that sociality and societality are both orientations of conduct--the former leading us into improvised and concursive relations with other persons, and the latter into generically regulated and discursive relations with various 'people'--it would seem possible to initially (albeit recursively) characterize practice as systematically relinquishing all impediments to social virtuosity. In a sense which will presently be explored, this is as much as to say that the practice of Ch'an should be seen as the labor of realising horizonless intimacy--in effect, an unprecedented blossoming of the bodhisattva life, the emergence of a pure buddha-land in the very midst of samsara.

PART II

PRACTICE:
THE EMBODIMENT OF ENLIGHTENMENT

CHAPTER 7

INTIMACY AND VIRTUOSITY: ENTERING THE GATE OF CH'AN PRACTICE

For most of us, the mention of practicing Ch'an conjures up a welter of images centered on the priority of meditation. We begin perhaps by envisioning a lone hermitage ringed by wind-blown pines, perched on the side of a mountain so lonely and remote that only wraithlike pieces of cloud wander its valleys. Within the thatched roof and stone walls of the hut, apparently unaware of the changing seasons and the daily advance of the sun, is a man or woman, head shaved and dressed in gray or saffron-colored robes. Seated cross-legged on a small cushion, eyes barely open, hands folded into a cradle-like mudra, he trains himself with the aim of eventually becoming a buddha, an enlightened one. Less romantically, we may see a group of such men or women, seated all alike with their backs to one another in a non-descript building at the corner of a downtown intersection. Concentratedly following their breath, they simply sit, perfectly still, surrounded with an aura of impenetrable silence and the sweet heaviness of sandalwood incense.

In either case, what such images reveal is a belief that the practice of Ch'an involves an at least temporary withdrawal from the tumult of daily life, a commitment to an inward journey that is apparently incompatible with satisfying the demands of career and family. Influenced perhaps by knowledge of the stress in Indian Buddhism on leaving the home life as a pre-requisite for fully "entering the stream", we think of practicing Ch'an as an essentially private or internal affair--the disciplined cultivation of various noble dispositions (physical, mental and moral), the acquisition of which is intended to finally bring about our awakening as buddhas. Recalling in addition the example of Bodhidharma's nine year long, solo retreat in a hillside cave, we are quite naturally

inclined to identify meditative training, and in particular sitting meditation (CH: *ts'o ch'an*, J: *zazen*), as the primary means by which each of us can eventually and quite apart from any association with others experience enlightenment.

Now, if this identification of practice with an individually undertaken course of meditative training that culminates in the experience of enlightenment is accepted as legitimate, the characterization of practice as opening up horizonless intimacy cannot but be dismissed as fundamentally mistaken. If, as our imagery suggests, practicing Ch'an is something that we ultimately carry out on our own, the total absence of others--far from being a cause for lament--may actually work very much to our advantage. And if for no other reason than this, the suggestion that enlightenment itself be conceived as social and not private or experiential in nature will appear to be misguided, if not ruinously misleading. It may well be that the Mahayana ideal has always been that of total immersion in the flux of daily life and never a private and necessarily transcendental retreat from it, but we find no inconsistency in thinking of this ideal as something realized after the fact of enlightenment. Parinirvana may be forfeited in consideration of others, but the basic experience of awakening is understood as indispensable--an experience we attain by way of meditative and moral training.

There can be no doubt, of course, that there is a strong relationship between meditation and the practice of Ch'an. Even discounting the story of Bodhidharma who was, after all, neither born nor trained in China, frequent references to sitting meditation in the indigenous literature of Ch'an certainly suggest that its usefulness is undeniable. What none of these passages indicate, however, is that sitting meditation is either a necessary or sufficient condition for the realization of enlightenment. To the contrary, meditating for the purpose of becoming a buddha is as often as not ridiculed--a labor as vain as diligently polishing a clay roofing tile in order to make a mirror.[1] Indicating why

this is so over the course of this and the following two chapters will not only provide us with the warrant for maintaining the sociality of Ch'an enlightenment, it will open up the possibility of realizing what Hui-neng meant when he stated that, "It is precisely Buddhist practice that is the Buddha." (PS, #42)

A.The Diversions of Experience.

There is nothing closer to us than our experience. That, at least, is the conventional wisdom, and granted its truth we have every reason to look to experience in search of 'enlightenment'. Whether this 'truth' has held in every time and place and for every person is impossible to say, but it is certainly the prevailing view. Significantly, being what is closest to us does not mean that experience is identical with us. Our experiences are often thought of as objects--things we may have or not have--even if an open-minded attentiveness tends to reveal no clear subject to do the having. In fact, it would seem that we only take the difference between our selves and what we experience to be both natural and healthy when we accept the premise that we are relatively enduring and autonomous individuals who in some sense link all of our experiences. In the absence of such a premise, the dislocation of self and experience is likely to be seen as pathological--a tear in the fabric of our given-togetherness since it places all others outside of and hence apart from us.[2] And yet it remains true for most of us that the very fact that experiences can be recalled suggests to us that we precede and outlast them (with the possible exceptions of the experiences of birth and death), so that even if the most arduous and vigilant introspections never uncover anything like self-subsistent, enduring selves, we typically continue assuming they exist--we have, after all, the objective evidence of experience itself.

For the Buddhist, matters are quite different. Visual experience, for example, is thought to occur with the contact of the visual sense-organ and a visual sense-object.

Visual consciousness is thus seen as a higher order system arising on the basis of sub-systems which by themselves entail nothing at all like 'vision'. But, unlike his realist, Indo-European counterparts, the Buddhist does not assume that the particularity of eye and visual object indicates their ultimate independence or even their self-subsistence. Like all things (*dharmas*), eyes and the objects they come into contact with are empty (*śūnya*). Having no permanent or substantial ground, they arise interdependently, and the visual consciousness which comes about as a function of their systematic contact must be seen as having no essential foundation. Because nothing at all has a permanent self, experience cannot be seen as implying an experiencing subject or an independent object, even if we remain steadfastly, even stubbornly committed to 'having experiences.'[3]

Far from being an innocuous figure of speech, our conventional commitment to the 'fact' of "having experiences" has profound ramifications. To begin with, under its auspices we will tend to see as 'things that happen' only what we can comprehend, what we can achieve closure with respect to--even if only by naming and making the unknown into an absence we conveniently fail to inspect. Since comprehension is a function of closing off inquiry--that is, of projecting relevance horizons allowing us to determine that some "thing" 'is'--experience, and hence what happens, will become a function of discrimination. Not only does this severely limit the creative potential of any given situation, it sets up the precedent for confronting the world (and thus ourselves as persons) as sources of acceptance and rejection, grasping or aversion. In short, by taking experience as something independent which we can either embrace (have) or resist (not-have), we unavoidably and altogether earnestly put ourselves in the position of making karma.[4] Secondly, due in part to the lived structure of having and in part to our identification with the projection of horizons as a crucial component in decision-making, the convention of 'having experiences' will also place us at the central focus of everything

that happens. The epistemological problem is one to which we will presently return, but more immediately the issue here is that when the bias toward experience is extended to encompass enlightenment, we find ourselves quite naturally thinking that becoming a buddha is something we can experience. Enlightenment becomes a goal, something to be sought and eventually made our own. We may admit that until we do so, everything we say about it is mere conjecture. We may even admit that once we experience enlightenment, we will not be able to communicate or pass on what we have experienced to others, no matter what language we avail ourselves of. But the implication we take for granted is that whether by practicing or by some unspecified form of grace, we can arrive at the point where we will be able to directly verify our expectations regarding enlightenment.

It may be that on this basis we conceive of practice as a kind of clearing process--the mirror cleansing recommended by Shen-hsiu, for example--by means of which we make room for the experience of enlightenment, and while this is not wholly untrue (at least in the Buddhist sense of 'true'), it is nevertheless misleading. First, by continuing to assume that we are independent selves--at the very least something other than our experiences--who must find a way through to the attainment of enlightenment, we do not imagine that awakening as a transformative exuberance burgeoning throughout our entire narrative and thus as not requiring either the acquisition or discarding of anything at all. To the contrary, we think of it as a state of consciousness which each of us quite separately earns and enjoys on the basis of making hard decisions about what we will and will not do. A function of our choice and hence of our discriminations, enlightenment becomes a karmically determined event. In so imagining, and no matter how altruistic our intentions may be, we remain hopelessly entangled in 'i', 'my' and 'me', even when we are astute enough to think of enlightenment as necessarily entailing some kind of ego loss.

The bias toward centrality that comes with a commitment to the foundational nature of experience is such that even when we consider what it is like to lose the boundaries of our self we imagine it from the perspective of a distinct somebody who undergoes the experience of ego-loss. Thus, contrary to the admonitions of every Ch'an master from Hui-neng to Lin-chi, we continue to think of practice as a vehicle for transporting ourselves from our current state of suffering to the extinction of that suffering in nirvana.

As long as we persist in envisioning practice as a means of ridding ourselves of unsatisfactory traits and experiences while positively cultivating those that are more in keeping with what we think is best for us, the driving metaphor of our imagination continues to be that of having and not-having.[5] Self-ishness flourishes and our discriminating between 'good' and 'evil', 'pure' and 'impure', 'samsara' and 'nirvana' continues unabated. Making distinctions in the hope of guiding ourselves through our presently unenlightened mix of experiences to a state we imagine to be much, much better, we see ourselves as beings who move in and through the world and who can at least dream of transcending all of our obstructions, all of the resistances we meet in pursuit of our goals. By imagining that someone attains enlightenment, we make it into something separate from us about which we can achieve at least enough closure to distinguish it from everything else. In short, as long as we are determined to maintain the paramount importance of experience, far from dissolving those features of our narrative which bring about the possibility of identifying ourselves as relatively enduring and existentially lonely individuals, meditative practice will actually reinforce the centrality of the very 'self' the Buddha sought to undermine. For the Buddha, we--the irreducible plurality of 'you' and 'i'--remain the central concern of practice.[6]

From a Buddhist perspective, then, the bias toward experience must be held wholly suspect. Philosophical hair-splitting aside, it is certainly possible to insist that--at

least as long as we are conscious--experience occurs. But inferring from this that experience is fundamental would be like asserting that music is basically the organized movement of air molecules on the grounds that air moves whenever we play a musical instrument. Just as music cannot be reduced to the fact of molecular kinetics, Buddhist enlightenment cannot be reduced to either (subjective) experience or its (objective) counterpart of behavior. In a word, the realization of enlightenment is not a matter of 'fact'--something that can be 'pointed out,' but one of meaning. As such, it cannot be the possession of any single individual but marks the transformation of an entire narrative, a revolution of conduct.

Focusing on experience cannot but raise the specters of 'self' and 'other'--a self-justifying diversion into 'knowing subjects' and 'known objects'. Bluntly stated, it is a way of forgetting who we really are, of dismembering our narrative into a plurality of mutually exclusive characters clustered around the centrality of our own ego. Seeking the experience of enlightenment is at the most profound level our greatest adversary, the most dear and hence virtually intractable of the 84,000 delusions that block the liberating realization of our true nature.

Now, it should be evident that if focusing on experience leads to the distinction of self and other (or more generally of subject and object) it must signal the erection of a boundary between here and there, between what 'is' and 'is-not'--a boundary or interface which entails the resistance or blockage of a free flow of energy through our narrative as a whole. Selfhood (especially in the form known as self-consciousness) marks the point at which the free development of meaning has in greater or lesser degree been arrested.[7] In Buddhist terms, the existence of selves is a function of karma, of the systematic deformation of character through the creation and maintenance of set patterns of bodily action, speech and thought--in a word, through the creation of an "identity."

If this be granted, and if enlightenment is the orient (and not the result of) practice, practice itself cannot be seen as a generator of experiences but instead as the transformation of narrative movement or conduct. Specifically, practice marks a profound and unremitting shift of orientation away from the division of self and other--what was referred to above as horizonless intimacy.

B. Intimacy and the Meaning of a Truly Social Life.

Having just finished eating the alms gathered that morning in his walk through Sravasti, the Buddha washed his bowl and settled himself in the midst of the bhikkus enjoying the shade in Anathapindika's park. Among those gathered under the luminous canopy of the park's many banyan trees was Subhuti, one of the Buddha's foremost disciples and a man of formidable intellect. Having also just finished his breakfast, Subhuti rose from his place and approached the master. Walking once around Gautama, he bared his shoulder in respect, settled himself on the sun-dappled grass, and after a brief pause asked how a bodhisattva should live, how he should orient his thoughts. Without any hesitation, the Buddha responds by saying that bodhisattvas must realize that even though they liberate all sentient beings, not even a single being will have been liberated. (DS 3)

At one level, the Buddha is here rehearsing a formula that will appear again and again throughout their discussion that day: a 'sentient being' is not a sentient being, we only refer to her as "sentient being." But he is also enjoining Subhuti to drop the premise that liberation--or, for that matter, anything else that happens--necessarily entails the existence of someone who is liberated. Subhuti initially seems satisfied with this injunction to drop the assumption that the question "who is liberated?" has an objective answer, but before long he feels compelled to ask about liberation itself. If no one is liberated, then what sense can be made out of freedom--what is it? If it were something

felt or known in the sense of a literal comprehension, then someone would be freed and that has already been denied. Is liberation something wholly objective, then? And if so, what could that possibly mean?

The Buddha is delighted with Subhuti's question and, no doubt smilingly, replies that when he attained ultimate enlightenment (*anuttara samyak saṁbodhi*), he didn't get a single thing.(DS 22) That is, ultimate enlightenment is not an experienced goal--something received or attained at the terminus of some more or less long period of training. But if that is true, and if enlightenment is not a comprehensible fact--something we can grasp--then what are all of the Buddha's followers doing? If enlightenment amounted to an exalted state of consciousness or of moral perfection or an all-encompassing wisdom--something definite, something known--then practice could be taken to be the means to arriving at that end. The hermeneutical injunction to practice would make good sense: attain enlightenment and then you'll know first-hand, in experience, exactly what the sutras 'mean'. But if a buddha cannot be known by any 'mark' (Skt: *lakṣaṇa*, Ch: *hsiang*), by any specific characteristics, and if there is no attainment (no subjective acquisition) and nothing attained (no experience), what is the point of practice?

We can begin answering this by returning briefly to the epistemological problem mentioned above. It has become almost canonical in the Indo-European tradition to consider experience as the bottom line of epistemology, usually with the result that the problem of knowledge comes to be seen as the reconciliation of experience and reality, of opinion and fact. That the Chinese never formulated such a problematic is significant for understanding the meaning of practice in Ch'an. To begin with, even if the Buddhism first brought to China from south Asia almost unilaterally endorsed the notion that practice (*bhāvanā*) amounted to a progressive cultivation of moral clarity (*śila*), concentration

(*samādhi*) and insight (*vipaśsanā*) leading to an eventual culmination in the attainment of wisdom (*prajñā*), this would not automatically entail the Chinese seeing practice as primarily a means of generating favorable experiences. Whereas the Buddhist Sanskrit term *prajñā* has the technical connotation of "knowledge of the waning of influxes" (*āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*) and implies the achievement of a state of consciousness untrammeled by defilements of any sort, the Chinese explained *prajñā* as either *hui* (intelligent, clever, quick-witted, wise) or *chih*[A]*-hui* (realization+quick-wittedness, or prudence). Wisdom, as the Chinese understood it, was not a matter of knowing about the nature of things and how they have come to be, or even one of realizing the cessation of unhealthy influences--both of which impute a knower who is separate from what is known--but of unconstrained and yet profoundly sensitive skill. Perfection here is not so much a matter of finalization or completion as it is a wholeness or roundness that remains vibrantly responsive.

As was discussed earlier, the conception of knowledge in Chinese culture has more to do with ready responsiveness than with the achievement of closure that serves as the guiding metaphor of the Indo-European imagination. For the Chinese, knowing the meaning of a word like *jen* is not a matter of being able to discourse on the virtues of being humane or authoritative, but rather the ability to conduct oneself in appropriate ways given a world of ever-changing circumstances. In short, knowledge has to do with the realization of lively concourse with others. For the Chinese, then, knowledge implies community and human relatedness to a degree nearly incomprehensible from the standpoint of a typically Indo-European approach to epistemology. In the end, displaying the meaning of *jen*--or, for that matter, of *prajñā*--will not mean a move to a more abstract dimension in which we appear as ideally disembodied knowers undistracted by the vagrant concerns of body, time and place, but an immersion in the unique

convolutions and interdependence of our day to day lives--that open-ended narration of which each of us is a crucial (if ultimately unprivileged) part.

The difference between knowing how to act and knowing what something is can admittedly be blurred into extinction by simply suggesting that knowing how to act **is** knowing what something is--namely, the best course of action given the situation. That is, we can reintroduce the primacy of an independent experiencer of knowledge by making 'knowing how' into a species of 'knowing that'--a shift of emphasis that is entirely natural for us.[8] But, curiously, the Chinese did not make this move. Without denying the ostensibly private character of feelings and thoughts and our ability to mask them--that is, our ability to lie or misrepresent our selves--the epitome of knowledge in (especially) Confucian China continued to be wholly embodied expressions of meaning (*li*--usually translated as "ritual action") and not subjective experience. What is most significant about this for understanding the peculiarly Ch'an approach to Buddhist practice is the refusal to shift the locus of knowledge out of the public sphere into the private. As ritual action, *li* serve to establish appropriate human relations--even when these are relationships between the living and the dead--and must, therefore, be seen as irreducibly interpersonal. Far from being thought of as a fixed code for individual action, *li* were seen as analogues of cosmic patterns that served to appropriately orient conduct (narrative movement). In this sense, the Chinese conception of knowledge can be said to be basically communal--a conception which, as Roger T. Ames has put it, "precludes the myth of the solitary knower." (personal communication, 1993)

This, however, did not mean that *li* acted as societally maintained curbs on personal freedom--a set of rigid prescriptions for behavior which we elect to perform simply to avoid conflict with those around us. Rather, they represent concrete modes (in especially the musical sense of the word) of knowing, of responsiveness, which are

learned to be sure, but which are not thought of as ultimately distinct from us. To the contrary, they should be seen as essentially underdetermined modes of relationship which can be wholly realized only through their personalization. Granted the relational view of self proper to Chinese culture, as lived patterns of human relatedness, *li* are thus at least as fundamental in our constitution as persons as are the shapes of our bodies or the fantasies and desires we can readily identify as 'mine alone.'[9]

Given that Chinese Buddhists were aware of the hermeneutical injunction to practice, and given the focus in Chinese culture on the interpersonal and not intrapersonal or intrapsychic dimensions of knowledge, it would only be natural for them to see practice as epistemically significant because it promised a deepening of their relationships both with one another and the foreigners who acted as emissaries for the Buddhist tradition. The locus of the meaning of practice would not be seen as the private spaces within our minds or hearts, but the open field of personal relationships, and instead of producing insights or revelations--the stuff of Indian mysticism and arguably much of the degenerated Buddhist traditions of South and Central Asia--practice would have been expected to open up novel and more integrative dimensions of conduct. Thus, Ma-tsu speaks of the path of Buddhism not as a means of arriving at some particular experiential end, but quite simply as "responding to opportunity and joining things" (*ying chi*[A] *chieh wu*[A]) (TTC, 45.406), where "things" (*wu*[A]) are understood not as substantial entities, but interpenetrating patterns of living disposition.

In the Confucian tradition, self-cultivation--precisely this sort of integrative expansion of conduct--was typically conceived as occurring under the rubric of the five relationships: father-son, elder brother-younger brother, husband-wife, ruler-minister, and friend-friend. Cultivating one's self meant nothing short of rectifying these relationships in a virtuosic manner, and at least initially, the same would have held true for the earliest

Chinese Buddhists. But as the doctrine of no-self was more profoundly assimilated, the emphasis on perfecting set relational patterns--not to mention the societal tendencies they can often encourage when ulterior motives and a concern for expedience come into play--would have diminished markedly. In short, knowing what was meant by "no-self" (Ch:*wu-wo*, Skt:*anātman*) would have eventually forced Chinese Buddhists into seeing their task as not identifying themselves with any particular role, but as a site of unhindered responsiveness. Having no 'self' would mean living as if we were free to adopt any place in the schema of the five relations, and not just those few given to us by the exigencies of our birth as male or female, first or last son, aristocrat or peasant. In a passage that neatly captures the anarchic gist of Ch'an practice, Huang-po remarks that once you embark on the path of making fewer and fewer distinctions in responding, you will eventually arrive at a point where there is no place to anchor. This, he says "is conducting yourself as all the Buddhas have. Then, in responding without having any fixed perspective, you are bringing forth your mind...This is known as 'supreme enlightenment'." (T. 2012.383b)

Thus, unlike the Confucian sage who remains firmly embedded within the definitions of his place and develops a virtuosity akin to that of a be-bop stylist and not a master of free jazz, the Ch'an ideal eventually comes to be epitomized in Lin-chi's famous "true man of no rank". Practice is not carried out in order to achieve something, but must be seen as opening up in unhesitating and unhindered responsiveness. As Pai-chang put it, the gate of Ch'an enlightenment is *dānapāramitā*--the perfection of offering.[10]

With the introduction of the themes of responsiveness and offering into the body of practice, we have set the initial precedent for exploring the relationship of Ch'an enlightenment and intimacy. But before doing so in earnest, special care must be taken to not carry along any last vestiges of the centrist biases associated with taking experience

as basic. With the shift from seeing practice as the means of attaining one or another form of experience to seeing it as a direct transformation of conduct or narrative movement, it is no longer possible to consider practice something that enables 'you' and 'I' to relocate ourselves from a present characterized by suffering to one free from crisis. The thrust of Ch'an is that practice is not a vehicle at all--the proverbial raft discarded once we have gained the other shore. Since persons have no identifiable location, conceiving of practice as a means of changing our place or circumstances is unintelligible. Huang-po goes so far as to say that "the Tao (path) that has no location is called Mahayana mind. This mind is not present inside, outside or in-between. In actuality, there are no 'locations'." (T 2012, 382c)

By denying the truth of goals, Ch'an renders cultivation irrelevant and forces us to admit that none of us will ever arrive at the experience of enlightenment. As the transformation of conduct or narrative movement, practice transports no 'one'. Instead, it must be seen as the meaning of a re-orientation of our entire narrative away from the duality of 'self' and 'other', 'have' and 'have-not', toward increasingly harmonious integration. In a word, it is never a single individual who practices, but only persons, entire worlds.

This is particularly hard to accept given the stubbornness with which we typically hold onto our identities as concrete individuals. At an intellectual level, it is easy enough to allow that a narrative understanding of persons provides a corrective to the biases that normally drive us toward taking ourselves to be autonomous individuals--a kind of "Copernican revolution" by virtue of which the concept of person is finally freed from the violence of the one-many dichotomy.[11] Once this revolution is carried out, it is impossible to regard either practice or enlightenment as functions of individual effort. Instead, they are effectively decentered, seen as transformations of an entire narrative and

not merely of a single character or ego-center within it. But, just as the Copernican revolution didn't alter our daily perception of the sun circling the earth, rising in the east and traversing the sky to set in the west, our intellectual grasp of a decentered reality does not alter our impression that we initiate and carry out our practice. We persist in thinking, at least hoping, that we will be the beneficiaries of our commitment.

Nothing could be further from the truth. When Subhuti is told that while a bodhisattva liberates all sentient beings, not a single sentient being is liberated, we are at first tempted to think that the Buddha is contradicting himself. The idea that liberation could occur without some 'one' being liberated is rationally repugnant--it means that there is some attribute with nothing for it to qualify; a mass, for example, with nothing that is massive. And yet, this is precisely the Buddha's point. Liberation is not of the self, but from it. The only way to bring suffering--a narrative interruption--to an end without making some karma which will eventuate a return to the same meaning configuration is to dissolve the source of the suffering, the 'i' who views the world through the projections of attachment and aversion. Thus, in his Essential Gate for Entering the Path, Pai-chang says that the principle of liberation "is just letting things come and not selecting anything." (HTC 119.425a)[12] Ma-tsu makes much the same recommendation: "When you're in the midst of either good or bad states of affairs, simply don't check anything. This is called being a cultivator of the Tao. Grasping the good, rejecting the evil and viewing emptiness as entering meditative stillness are all classed as 'over-doing-it'." (TTC45.406a) Any activity on our behalf (even where that explicitly includes others as in the case of altruism) insures that 'we' remain. That is, we continue creating the conditions which give rise to a sense of identity and with it the manifestation of attraction and resistance. Making use of the systems-theoretical model, this amounts to saying that because an individual identity--as a higher order system not reducible to the sum of its

(bodily, emotive, intellectual and even spiritual) component parts--is open, it can persist only by taking in and retaining some form of energy. 'Selves' are, in this sense, possible only when there is some blockage to the free flow of energy through our world/narrative. But this is as much as to say that selves are possible only when there is suffering. Ending suffering is losing our 'selves'.[13]

Liberating a sentient being means taking off the mantle of both conceptual and felt distinctions by means of which he or she is individuated or made into some 'one' existing apart from others even while in the closest contact with them. In the vernacular of the Buddhist tradition, this mantle is referred to as "karma"--the matters by which we are bound and which can be dissolved only by the antidote of what Ch'an calls "no-'mind'". As with the sailor who has a definite port of call in mind and can therefore speak of favorable and ill winds, it is only to the extent that we indulge in identifying with some abiding form, that we can intelligibly speak of things going 'well' or going 'awry'. Without this identification, there is nothing to resist the spontaneous and interweaving flow of events--the natural course of our narration.

In a practical sense, what this implies is that the flow of our narration can be objectionable only insofar as the lines of force within it find some resistance around which they can tighten. Without a central ego which takes as its vocation the avoidance of 'ill' and the pursuit of 'happiness', then, suffering is quite impossible--an insight which almost invariably leads to us pondering just what we can do about lessening (if not altogether eliminating) the influence of our egos. We want to be able to do something about our predicament, and that is part of the problem.

In the most general sense, karmic entanglements are never loosened by intentional activity.[14] Like knots which only tighten further when meddled with, karmic bonds can only be undone by providing them with no purchase, by eschewing the process of

deciding what we want and do not want to have in experience. As a means of opening us up to this most crucial aspect of the practice life, Ch'an has traditionally employed the imagery of sea and sky as metaphors for the mind that is Buddha. A mind that is like the ocean or the empty sky does not resist anything. No matter what something looks like, no matter how objectionable we might typically think of its form as being, the ocean and sky unhesitatingly accept it. Moreover, neither the sky nor the ocean can be tied up or bound. No amount of ingeniousness will enable us to keep water in a net or to tie a knot around air. Nor is it possible to use air or water to block objective movement. A wall of water or air may have great force when it is itself in motion, but at rest, not even the weakest thing is incapable of penetrating and passing through it. The initial method of Ch'an is thus realizing an oceanic mind--a mind that is as clear as space.

Notably, there is a tradition in the Mahayana that immediately upon attaining enlightenment, the Buddha entered what is referred to as the "ocean seal samadhi". In the terms we have been articulating, this is as much as to say that the initial, narrative impact of enlightenment--its characteristic transformation of conduct--is the realization of an ocean-like harmony of self and other. Now, the Sanskrit term "samadhi" originally referred to a state of concentration or meditative absorption, suggesting that its nature is mental or internal--a cessation of distraction and a fixation of the mind. For the Chinese, however, the term carries a much more dynamic meaning since mind is not understood as the locus of experience as much as it is a particular constellation of narrative dispositions--that is, a constellation of dispositions for the realization of certain kinds of dramatic relationship by virtue of which some characters, settings and occurrences are much more likely to co-presence than others. 'Mind' is, thus, not located in the world, but should be seen as the characteristic realizing of a world.

Now, while it is true that a samadhi is said to occur when the mind is *ting*--the typical translation of which is "fixed" or "settled"--since mind is seen in dispositional terms and not as a locus or generator of experience, being settled doesn't indicate a lack of movement, but rather certainty of direction or dramatic development.[15] Moreover, since the prevailing conception of *ting* within the Ch'an tradition is that of meeting (*tui*) your environment with no-mind (*wu-hsin*) (HTC 119.420b), and since *tui* carries the connotations of confronting, correcting and immediately responding, *ting* itself must be understood less as a kind of hunkering imperturbability or fixation on a set destination as maintaining a clear direction, an unswerving orientation in conduct.[16] Since we are to greet all things with no-'mind', *ting* cannot be construed as a contrary of improvisation, but that continuity of concern which allows us to respond in manners which are neither rigidly ordered or merely chaotic. Ch'an meditation (*ting*) is not, therefore, typified by silent repose, but rather by a dynamic and unreservedly confident (*hsin*^{A}) meeting with whatever comes one's way. "Just like right now, whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down, responding to opportunity and joining things is entirely Tao." (TTC 45.406a)

For the Ch'an practitioner, the Buddha's ocean seal samadhi is not a kind of dispassionate regard for all things, but a wholly dynamic opening up to and drawing in of all things. And so, while Ma-tsu remarks that, "being constantly calm and extinguished (*chi*^{B}*-mieh*, nirvana) is called making the ocean seal samadhi", this calmness and state of extinction is understood as a dynamic absence of impediments to integration with others and the achievement of a common enlightenment. Ma-tsu goes on to say that, "Taking in all things (*she-i-ch'ieh-fa*), it (nirvana) is like 100,000 streams equally returning to the great ocean. All are designated ocean water, and so savoring one taste is to take in all tastes. Abiding in the great ocean is then the turbulent confluence of all streams." That is, abiding in nirvana is entering into samsara, the mutual suffering that occurs when

narratives initially interrupt or break into one another. "For this reason, a person who washes in the great ocean uses all the waters." (TTC 45.406a-b) In short, whoever cleanses his or her own mind thereby cleanses the minds of all other sentient beings--skillfully accomplishing the work of the bodhisattva. "If you want to obtain the Pure Land, you should purify your own mind." (PS #38, quoting the Vimalakirti Sutra).

Entering the ocean seal samadhi is thus to incorporate the karma of all those we meet into our own narrative. It is to allow the sediments deposited by the habituation of intent and experience to be eroded and finally absorbed without remainder. To use a common Ch'an phrase, when our conduct comes about from the clarity of no-'mind', our individual actions are--like words written on water or in the air--without form or trace. In this sense, as a bodhisattva the practitioner of Ch'an receives whatever comes into his or her life without attaching to it, without either averting or holding onto it in any way. And for this reason, the Chinese often referred to the ocean-seal samadhi as the "ocean mirror," and to its associated level of understanding as the "great, round mirror wisdom."

The mirror metaphor has had special currency in East Asian Buddhism because mirrors remain untainted by what they reflect and therefore seem an appropriate symbol of buddha-nature.[17] But for Ch'an, the most salient characteristic is that mirrors don't discriminate according to form, but take on the appearance of whatever presents itself, whatever the circumstances require. In this sense, the mirror is a particularly apt metaphor for the conduct of the bodhisattva who has unlimited skill in means and who--no matter how extreme the situation--can respond immediately and without any reservations, supplying whatever is needed without retaining anything for him or herself. Unlike the typical conception of mirrors as nothing more than surfaces which can reflect who 'we' are and hence foster our narcissistic tendencies, the Ch'an Buddhist conception does away with the reflected 'i' and replaces it instead with an orientation of concern and

compassion. This is the significance of Huang-po's denial that buddha-mind is like the moon. "Mind," he insists, "is like the sun constantly circling through the empty sky. Naturally luminous, it does not reflect light, but radiates...[this] is conducting yourself as all the buddhas have." (T 2012.383b)

The practice of Ch'an is not getting enlightenment--achieving some state of mind or some particular complex of experience--but enlightening, living the bodhisattva life and thereby creating innumerable, pure buddha-lands. And so whatever enters the ocean mirror is received without resistance and then returned purified and without remainder. In the end, this is possible only if we realize no-'mind'--that is, if we relinquish any internal and external blockages or horizons that arise, retaining nothing which will give rise to the habits and fixed dispositions by means of which 'you' and 'i' are identified. True non-attachment is not a kind of impassiveness, then, but unobstructed responsiveness, boundless giving.

The realization of this campestrial generosity within and complemented by the oceanic inclusiveness of a mind that selects no-'thing' is what was referred to earlier as horizonless intimacy. According to the prevailing dictates of the European imagination, intimacy must be taken to be a kind of discourse. However deeply the intimate encounter may be internally characterized by the feeling of open-ended sharing and even integration, our usual conception of intimacy entails a sharp divergence between the private and public--that is, between the protected space within which we can open up to one another and lose (even if only partially and for a short time) our sense of separateness and isolation, and that greater sphere within which we are all equally present and yet undeniably alone. Thus, the intimate conversation takes place in hushed tones, the love letter is "for your eyes only," and the lovers' tryst takes place in a moon-lit garden, a tree-encircled meadow unwatched by human eyes, or at least in the bustling anonymity of a

public park which insures a defacto privacy--the privacy of being taken as just another feature of the environment. The poetic, fictive and cinematic depictions of intimacy with which we are most familiar all involve a disjunction of the personal and the public, of the inner and the outer. Intimate partners take one another into themselves, but in so doing at least initially disregard those around them by either physically or psychologically distancing them. That is, our usual construal of intimacy involves the projection of a horizon marking off 'us' and 'them', the sphere of completely open vulnerability and that of regulated self-protection.

To be sure, such a separation of the spheres of intimacy and publicity marks the institution of a relatively effective strategy for overcoming some of the primary sources of suffering or narrative disruption. By wrapping ourselves in an exclusive mantle of intimacy, we are able to open ourselves enough to feel fully human without exposing ourselves to the vagrant demands of the general populace. With our chosen partners, we establish the possibility and usually the acknowledged goal of relating in an unmitigatedly social fashion, allowing our uniqueness to blossom freely and with gratitude. With all others--and this is admittedly a function of degree and not absolute boundaries--we tend to fall into a societal manner, meeting them not as our "better halves," as long-lost parts of our selves, but as individuals with whom we have only external and ideally contingent relations. Thus, the intimate relationship becomes a refuge, a kind of second skin into which we can withdraw when the pressures of our day-to-day interactions with others threaten to derail our preferred--that is, our customary--flow of experience. In our intimate life, we feel we can really "be who we are," dispensing with the hide-and-seek gamesmanship of public life. And so, we see no inconsistency between being a crack military strategist and a loving father, between being

a tender spouse and a hard-nosed litigator, between being a publicly cold and analytic business consultant and a privately passionate, even reckless lover.

That this disjunction of the public and private is generally effective as a means of holding suffering at bay can be seen in the simple fact that when an intimate relationship falls apart--when the sanctity of the space of shared self-hood is violated and then torn asunder--we as often as not take refuge in our jobs, our hobbies, in the tumult of the public life, even in the self-divesting upheaval of religious conversion. The break-up leaves us feeling raw, exposed in the way that only a wound can expose us, and our natural tendency is thus to retreat into that part of our life where we are relatively invulnerable, where our societal armor is best maintained. Like an injured fox seeking out the uterine closeness of its burrow, we return to the birthing sites of the 'self', the places where our incompleteness isn't mentioned even if it's noticed, where we are apparently individual and safe.

Intimacy in this sense depends on a sense of trust. We approach each other with careful reserve and will begin fully opening up to one another only once we have determined that we pose no threats to each other. In other words, we become intimate only once we have gotten to know one another, when we have achieved enough of a sense of closure to be willing to expose our incompleteness. Failing this, we remain aloof, having decided in effect that the potential danger to our selves is too high to warrant the kind of vulnerability that intimacy demands. Trust which is not child-like--that is, which is not unconditional is necessarily based on a calculation of risks to the integrity of the reflexive discourse by means of which we identify who we are. As such, trust must be seen as part of the project of affirming and strengthening the self. Intimacy is something into which 'you' and 'i' chose to enter.

By contrast, the ocean mirror of practicing Ch'an is ultimately oriented toward the advent of an intimacy free of all 'self'-ishness--an intimacy which is not born in an accentuation of the discourse of public and private, but in horizonless concourse. Whereas a selfish entry into intimacy is burdened with a concern for potential loss--of the familiarity of our present way of life, our independence, youth, wealth, or secrets--practitioners of Ch'an have already recognized their own emptiness, the absence of anything which they can definitively call their own. Eschewing the possessiveness and discrimination that comes with the assertion that "I am,"[18] they are able to open up fearlessly and without reservation. Only in this way is it possible to follow Ma-tsu's advice to "take in all things (*she-i-ch'ieh-fa*)," according with the situation and responding as needed (*sui-shih-ying-yung*).

Perhaps the greatest exemplary of this mode of conduct is--for the Chinese Buddhist--the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara or Kuan Shih Yin [literally, "perceiving-world-sound] whose ability to see any situation clearly and respond as needed is symbolically manifested in her depictions as the thousand-eyed, thousand-armed goddess of compassion. As the great master of love and sympathy (*t'zu-pei-ta-shih*[B]), Kuan Yin not only hears the cries of the world, she incorporates them, feels them as her own (Ch: *pei*, Skt: *karuna*) and responds with the all-embracingness of a healing love (Ch: *tz'u*, Skt: *maitri*)--a love that mends what has been sundered. Recalling that suffering is best seen as narrative interruption or the blockage of the free and creative orientation of our conduct--the experience of intractability or (what for the Buddhist is the same thing) unreality--the healing which occurs with Kuan Yin's attendance to our needs and desires should itself be seen as the dissolution of those horizons by means of which 'distance' comes to be seen as ontically grounded separation or severance. Needs and desires, after all, can only occur when some apparent limit (*ching*) segregates 'us' and 'what we lack',

when what-I-am is effectively cut off from what-I-am-not. What Kuan Yin accomplishes with her wish-fulfilling gem is not necessarily the closing of some objective difference or distance, but the erasure of whatever has been imposed on our relations with others (our narration) to give us the illusion of discontinuity, of painful cleavage, of intractability. In short, Kuan Yin's work is the restoration of intimacy.

For the Chinese,[19] intimacy (*ch'in*) is not primarily conceived in terms of a dyadic and typically exclusive relationship. While *ch'in*--like the Latin *intus* (a superlative form of "within") from which the English "intimacy" derives--does imply nearness, this is seen in terms of the closeness or affection of kinship. Given the Chinese construal of personhood in terms of a field of relationships, kinship cannot be understood simply as a matter of blood or lineage, but of shared feeling and the dovetailing of unique contributions in the constitution of the harmony known as family (*chia*). Kinship in this sense is not something given with birth, but achieved and maintained--an orientation of conduct by means of which each member of a family realizes that virtue (*te*) which is uniquely his or her own. Thus, the term *ch'in* means not only being close, but "being related," "relative," "affection," "self," "in person," and "family". Intimacy does not, that is, join individuals in some special way, but marks the harmonious functioning of an entire family or clan and ultimately of the entire world. It is not psychological in nature, but social.

C.Virtuosity and the Perfection of Offering and Appreciation.

Most importantly, then, seeing practice as realizing unimpeded intimacy not only has the effect of challenging us to give up any set dispositions we discover in our conduct but of doing so in such a way that we do not lapse into random and ultimately 'self'-serving or 'self'-defeating activity. Instead of making consistency (logical or otherwise) our principle and establishing the precedent for a crusade to cleave 'right' from 'wrong' at

every available opportunity, we are invited to valorize flexibility and refrain from calculating the probable returns on various courses of action. In a word, we are asked to quit trying to control what happens. Instead of regarding others through the prismatic lens of self-determined and ultimately self-serving trust, we are urged to allow our conduct to be *wu-wei*--that is, fully improvised, without any precedent or ulterior motive. Only in this way can we, like Kuan Yin with her wish-fulfilling gem, freely pass through the gate of Ch'an enlightenment and embody unobstructed *dānapāramitā* or the perfection of offering.

But this is far from easy. As long as we are not entirely free of doubt, we are constantly searching for something or someone to validate our decisions, to warrant our actions and intentions, to guide us toward our chosen ends. And so, when we resolve a difficult situation by acting in a certain way, a precedent is set for acting in that way whenever similar situations occur. This, we think, is what it means to learn from experience. But for the practitioner of Ch'an, the appeal to *yu-wei* (action on the basis of pre-existing dispositions) is a form of dependence which makes it impossible to accord with every new situation and simply respond as needed. Instead, we will interpret what is happening now as an instance of a much more general flow of experience and will react on the basis of what we 'know' to expect from it. Whether this interpretation is scientific, religious, political, mythic or entirely idiosyncratic is irrelevant. Nor is it relevant whether our precedented behavior leads to 'success' or not since any consistently maintained course of intention/action will give rise to conditions which apparently call for more of 'the same'. That is the law of karma, the process by means of which we are bound up as selves.[20] True intimacy is forestalled by the projection of an interposing, analytic framework.

Thus, one of the more common teachings in Ch'an is the need to "know when to keep the precepts and when to break them." That is, we are not instructed to rely on the teachings or the sutras or even the Dharma as a whole, but rather on ourselves--on nothing at all. Allowing our conduct to proceed *wu-wei* entails not a frustrated capitulation to "the way things are," but an anarchic and unblemished confidence (*hsin*^{A}), since only someone who is entirely fearless can open him or herself up to the improvisational demands of horizonless intimacy. In short, practicing Ch'an as the realization of unimpeded intimacy should be seen as the path of inconceivable skill in means--of unhesitating, social virtuosity.

The themes of intimacy and virtuosity are neatly brought together by Huang-po in his suggestion that "Manjusri should be regarded as the pattern (*li*^{B}), Samantabhadra as the practice (*hsing*^{A}). The pattern is that of unhindered, pure emptiness. The practice is that of inexhaustibly departing from forms." (T 2012.380a) To begin with, on an abstract level Huang-po is suggesting that the body or pattern of liberation is interdependence (emptiness, Skt: *śūnyatā* or Ch: *k'ung*)--the absence of any abiding identities, while its vitality is non-attachment ("departing from forms")--relinquishing the horizons which make 'me' different from 'you'. Together, these give rise to the radiance of enlightened conduct. But by speaking of pattern and practice as persons, Huang-po indirectly and yet keenly alerts us to the fact that there is no 'one' who maintains this pattern and performs this practice. Instead, pattern and practice are both aspects (*mien*) of who we are--characteristic expressions of our undivided nature, a deft enlivening of the flow of our entire narration. As Ma-tsu put it, "Everything is your own body. Were it not so what kind of person could there be?" (TTC 45.406b)

Moreover, the Chinese transliteration of Manjusri (*wen-shu*) has the literal connotation of "killing the classics/the literary embodiment of culture," while

Samantabhadra (*p'u-hsien*) means "universal capability/versatility/talent." The pattern is thus avoiding the reduction of "right conduct" to acting in a manner consistent with the precedents set by others for situations we never actually meet. Killing the classics is destroying the basis for a reliance on and placing of our confidence in any societal codifications of behavior. In effect, it means leaving all prescriptions behind and living a fully social life. But this is possible only if we are also able to respond in any direction at any time, if we are--like Samantabhadra--the embodiment of unlimited versatility. Giving up the relatively successful and stable structure of societally approved behavior is advisable only when we are so skillfully and roundly attuned to the world that no matter how unexpectedly we are jolted out of the normal flow of our narration we can respond without deliberating, realizing a new and more openly diverse harmony. Otherwise, we shall fall into hesitation and doubt and drown in utter confusion--either alone or while dragging along whoever tries to lend us a hand. Seeing pattern as Manjusri and practice as Samantabhadra is thus to regard Ch'an as relinquishing all boundaries as they appear and responding directly and confidently to the needs of others--in short, the marriage of intimacy and virtuosity.

While the Indian tradition took the absence of any substantial core at the center of a banana tree as one of its guiding metaphors for emptiness and later fell prey to a tendency to regard the latter as some sort of central and transcendent reality,[21] Chinese Buddhists tended to understand *k'ung* (literally a 'hollowness') in terms of the open quality of the sky or space. Thus, for Huang-po and the Ch'an tradition generally, emptiness is understood as expansiveness, as oceanic receptivity, and interdependence is conceived less in terms of an external relation characterized by mutual reliance as in terms of unobstructed interpenetration.[22] In this light, it is interesting that Huang-po repeatedly claims that enlightenment [the realization of *wu-hsin* (no-'mind')] is a "silent

bond and that's all (*mei-ch'i^A-erh^A-i^A*)."[23] Recalling Ma-tsu's suggestion we see Tao as "responding to opportunity and joining things" (*ying-chi^A-chieh-wu^A*), Huang-po's *mei-ch'i^A* makes it quite clear that the path of liberation is not--as is the case in the Upanishadic tradition--one of gradually extricating ourselves from the samsaric net of human relationships. To the contrary, liberation must be seen as implicating us ever more deeply in the lives of those with whom we come into contact.

This would seem to be the meaning of Huang-po's use of *ch'i^A*, a word which originally referred to the notches or tally marks made on a piece of bamboo when the terms of a trade agreement had been set and which was later extended to signify any mutually established bond or contract. The general sense of *ch'i^A*, and hence of Ch'an enlightenment, is that of entering into an uncoerced relationship of shared obligation or responsibility with others--committing ourselves to an explicitly concursive mode of conduct. At the same time, it is clear that Huang-po did not want to encourage us to think of this as a purely voluntary act in the sense of a course of action 'you' and 'i' choose by and for our 'selves'. Hence his pointed qualification of this bond as *mei* (silent/dark/secret)--something that is tacit or unspoken and hence not necessarily a function of having reached a self-conscious decision.

The significance of this cannot be overemphasized. Our experience of ourselves as enduring, self-conscious entities is in large part a function of the language-mediated fission of the unique world of our narration into distinct (eternal) 'universals' and (relatively short-lived but definitely located) 'particulars'. As far as Ch'an is concerned, "It is in establishing names that differences come to be," (HTC 119.423b) especially the difference between us and that about which we discourse. Whenever we speak, we take up a position or view (*drsti*) from which we can say that something is or is-not, and so 'we' remain part of what is spoken even if no mention is made of men and women, of

selves and others. Unlike music-making where it is possible for everyone involved to both sing and listen simultaneously, speech establishes a clear duality of actor (speaker) and acted upon (listener)--what in Chinese Buddhism is referred to as *neng-suo*--and therefore sets up a guiding precedent for the identification of our 'self' as the generating nexus of experience. Thus, Huang-po remarks that "when the route of words and speech is severed, the practice of mental states is extinguished." (T 2012.380b) Instead of moving from experience to experience, we realize the lack of any objective marks separating us from everything else. By departing from all forms, we silence the ego and enter into a profound rapport. As a "silent bond," Ch'an liberation can be seen as the advent of true religion--the recovery of our original nature as persons.

Now, it should be clarified that Ch'an does not have a problem with making distinctions as such--after all, there is a distinction between what brings about harmony and what further exacerbates an ongoing break in our narration. But Ch'an does deny the ultimate basis and practical utility of the kind of lasting distinctions we establish through language. It is habit and not the power of making distinctions that is problematic, and precisely because it inhibits the wondrous functioning or superlative usability (*miao-yung*) of the latter. And so, while Lin-chi claims that as soon as he opens his mouth he has made a mistake--that even the intention to talk about Ch'an is evidence of error--he was famous for demanding that his students unhesitatingly engage him in conversation. If they paused to think about their reply or to consider the meaning of his remarks, Lin-chi would as often as not yell at or strike them with the demand that they "Speak, speak! Give me one true word!" Cutting off the route of language is not, therefore, the equivalent of becoming speechless, but is refusing to follow the dictates of linguistic convention, imagining that 'you' and 'i' are not aspects of a seamless whole just because a river of words and concepts apparently separate us. Just as a knife can be used to carve a buddha-

statue or to murder a rival, language can be used as a liberative technique--something the Vimalakirti Sutra makes quite clear (see especially T 475. 540c, 553c). What is not permissible if this is to occur is that one takes what language refers to as anything other than a set of more or less stable conventions which can be dispensed with when necessary.

Thus, Pai-chang makes it clear that the great, round mirror wisdom is nothing other than the emptying of all duality by being able to be confronted by various sensations without giving rise to aversion or attachment--that is, without falling prey to habitual judgments of like and dislike. "If you're able to enter the various sense-fields and realms, **excel at being able to make distinctions** without giving rise to disruptive thoughts and remain free and comfortable (*tzu tsai*)--that is the wisdom of wondrous contemplation and examination. If you're able to make the various senses accord with circumstances, respond to need and comprehend entering correct reception (*shou*), there's no duality and that is the wisdom of perfecting what has been made." (HTC 424a)

Crucially, the failure to understand that such practice is not something done by and for one's 'self' not only makes it impossible to stop acting *yu-wei*, it disposes us toward seeing our relationships with others as individually dispensable and collectively necessary only for ease in satisfying certain of our (typically material) needs. Because we take it for granted that 'you' and 'i' will attain enlightenment at some point, we feel compelled to determine which risks are worth taking and which seem destined to result in a loss of identity--something that the Ch'an Buddhist can only see as amounting to a forfeiture of liberation. 'Practice' will then only continue to inculcate marks of differentiation.

As long as we are unwilling to place ourselves deeply at risk, not only is true intimacy prohibited, we will effectively divert our experience away from precisely those

configurations most likely to demand a completely unprecedented break with our accustomed range and orientation of conduct. In short, we will avoid the kind of adversity on which virtuosity thrives. Unlike skills which are developed gradually and are able to be used more or less at will, virtuosity is not the direct result of effort and intention. Nothing is more familiar to listeners of jazz than the wholly unsatisfying pyrotechnics of performers who possess skills of the highest order and so little inspiration or feel that their playing seems predictable at best and mechanical at worst. Notes are played seemingly for their own and not a profoundly musical sake, and no matter how impressive this is technically the improvisations so generated fail to draw us into intimate relation with the musicians and the world they are creating. To the contrary, the music as often as not draws too much attention to itself as an object for our appraisal and serves in the end only as mediation. Especially in the context of Chinese culture, this kind of thorough immersion in *yu-wei* is seen as improper not simply because it is typically productive of uninteresting and uninspiring music, but because the display of technical brilliance for its own sake is conducive only to our further standing out from and ultimately apart from one another.[24]

As a minimal condition, then, virtuosity arises only when we realize a shockingly creative and unexpected union of an actual crisis--be it political, social, intellectual or even dramatic--and those formless qualities of concern and capability which will open up its truth. In short, virtuosity has no abiding nature. Just as the completely amorphous liquid known as water has no existence apart from a continuing union of two hydrogen atoms with single atoms of oxygen, there is no virtuosity in the absence of an always unique union of adversity with a concerned and unconstrained versatility. Were unconstrained versatility--the supreme attainment of technical expertise or skill--untempered by concern and undirected by the unexpectedness of adversity, it would

result in nothing more profound than the momentary pleasures of masturbation. Indeed, it is common parlance among musicians to refer to music realized solely on the basis of technical excellence as "musical masturbation." The fact that we can speak, for example, of certain musicians as being occasionally capable of great displays of virtuosity may suggest that it is a thing individually acquired and then possessed. But this is nothing more than an illusion produced by the peculiarities of our grammar with its scission of subject and object, of agents and their acts, and taking it seriously is no more advisable that is trying to quench our thirst at a mirage. True virtuosity always occasions intimacy. Far from being a function of individually possessed talent, it is irreducibly social in nature and hence necessarily communal.

As we have already seen, in a Buddhist context truth is neither the timeless or eternal nature of things nor a correspondence between the world and our judgments about it. Rather, it should be seen as an entirely dynamic and corrective reorientation of narrative movement away from habitually restrictive channels into the signlessness of living freedom. Given this, and allowing that virtuosity has the function of opening up the truth of what seem initially to be intractable crises, it is possible to see the bodhisattva life as an ongoing manifestation of virtuosity. That is, the bodhisattva takes as his or her labor the initiation of unprecedented breaks with the ultimately discursive dictates of karma.[25] The business of the bodhisattva is not to disseminate information about nirvana and samsara, to deliver awe-inspiring gospels of enlightenment, or even to convey sentient beings to the nether shore, but to enter into unbounded and chartless concourse.

Practicing Ch'an thus depends on our being subject to narrative patterns--that is, forces both 'natural' or 'external' and 'psychological' or 'internal'--operating counter to our customary and hence preferred dispositions and the typical (habitual) actions they spawn. In the absence of such challenges, virtuosity simply cannot arise. It is possible, for

example, for a jazz saxophonist to spend years diligently working on his or her chops and to acquire a degree of technical proficiency seldom achieved by others on the instrument. Given a standard tune like "My Favorite Things" to perform, he or she can elect to navigate the interpenetrating harmonic and melodic spaces by playing note for note the exact changes originally penned by Rogers and Hammerstein, and in so doing will certainly be lauded as an exceptionally competent player. But as long as this is the case, as long as the sax player is dedicated only to following musical prescriptions, he or she will never attain virtuosity. This comes about if and only if he or she elects to respond in an unprecedented way to the contours set for the musical space referred to as "My Favorite Things"--usually by striking out into previously unknown musical terrain. This may mean little more than improvising off of the established lead lines in such a way as to imply and then elicit from the rest of the ensemble previously unheard and unconceived harmonic and rhythmic motifs. It may, however, involve using the set structure of "My Favorite Things" as a kind of doorway through which the sax player leads his or her fellow musicians, destination unknown. Listen, for instance, to John Coltrane's several recorded renditions of the piece. Especially in the more improvisational forms of jazz, virtuosity entails opening up the horizons of a piece and giving birth to entirely new worlds.

Now, just as has been the case with every other type of true exploration, this extension of the limits of the known makes us vulnerable to unforeseen and in principle unforeseeable crises. If the sax player is unequal to the task of immediately resolving a dissonance or conflict of harmonic and rhythmic tempos, the performance will either disintegrate into noise or simply have to be yanked violently back into the most familiar of changes. As anyone who has participated in or listened to jazz improvisations knows, when the magic is happening there is no limit to what can be played, no ceiling to the

musical heights attained. When the magic fails--usually because someone stops actively and responsively listening--there is no limit to how abysmal the event can get. The same, of course, is true in our 'personal' relationships. The opportunity for realizing horizonless intimacy arises only when we allow the relationship to get far enough out of our individual control that our usual roles dissolve in an unprecedented and unpredictable dance of mutual attunement.[26]

And so, as the process of systematically relinquishing all impediments to social virtuosity, the practice of Ch'an must be seen as a committed flirtation with failure. The practitioner of Ch'an, far from retreating into the insulating solitude of the mountain cave or the deep forest glade, takes as one of his or her primary tasks the resolute courting of disaster, traditionally and specifically at the hands of his or her master and more generally in the tumult of daily life. Making him or herself maximally open to the possibility of interruption, diversion or conflict, practice is not directly a cultivation of peacefulness or quietude, but a radical exposure to risk. Practice entaiis unreservedly endangering one's 'self'.

In Ch'an, this self-endangering comes about as a joint function of refraining from acting on the basis of our ingrained likes and dislikes and engaging in truly social communication. The written records of the Ch'an tradition are luxuriant with injunctions to not discriminate--for the Chinese, to not conduct ourselves differently in the face of--good and evil, the pleasing and the unpleasing, the desired and the undesired. The point is not to achieve a kind of psychic numbness or imperturbability, but rather to both stop averting the dependent arising of what we refer to as ill and cease chasing after that which we think of as good. We are asked, in other words, to accept our karma--the conditioned and regularly patterned deformation of experience--rather than trying to escape it.[27]

Doing otherwise only makes more karma, further binding us by identifying as 'me' the recipient of the consequences of past deeds.

Normally, we try to avoid ill and pursue good, thinking that who we are is totally and without remainder present at this point in time. We seem to feel that if we can avoid an unpleasant result now, that we stand a good chance of avoiding it forever. The Buddha was, however, clear in his denial of this reasoning. In fact, no intentional act is without experienced consequences. All that is in question is the timing, the precise moment at which the energy we intentionally diverted from its natural course will come full circle, and this is a matter of conditions over which we ultimately cannot exercise complete and direct control. While we may deflect this 'return' by so altering the present conditions--typically either through some form of ignorance or strenuous self-control--that the time is no longer ripe, we cannot prevent the eventual recurrence of appropriate conditions. In actuality, we as often as not make it possible for this karma to appear only at those times when we are least vigilant in our discriminations. That is, we make ourselves liable to what will be lamented as unforeseeable accidents or instances of 'bad luck', often coming in strings. In respect of what we prefer, we will often contrive to bring about conditions which will foster the appearance of what we think is good, and in so doing further enmesh ourselves, deepening the experiential ruts into which we have diverted the flow of our narration--the behavior of our friends and family, the dispositions of our enemies, the prevailing political, economic and cultural climate, the condition of the ecosphere and so on. Thus, while the gods could be said to have the best of all possible incarnations, being entirely free of pain and unpleasantness, the Buddha insisted that they could not attain enlightenment. That possibility he reserved only for human beings--beings who can engage their suffering with unbridled virtuosity.

In that we have already maintained that communication is itself a placing of the self at risk, it should come as no surprise that Ch'an--ostensibly a "transmission beyond words and letters"--is of all the Chinese Buddhist schools the one which has placed the concourse of student and master at the very crux of both its doctrinal corpus and its practical injunctions.[28] For example, unlike the transmitted tradition of Indian Buddhism where the student ideally hears the dharma and then goes off on his or her own to gain insight into it through solitary meditation--a pattern which we still see operative in the not yet completely sinified teaching style embodied by Hui-neng in the Platform Sutra--the Ch'an disciple who does not immediately engage the patriarchs of the tradition in lively, communicative improvisation is reviled as a mere "hearer" (*srāvaka*) or, in Lin-chi's less than gracious terminology, as a "worthless shit-stick." (T 1985.496c) Indeed, when a student has exhausted the ability of a given teacher to awaken a recognition of their own nature, they are not typically instructed to go off by themselves to practice and become a pratyeka or self-enlightened buddha, but to travel to see this or that Ch'an master; often with the warning that this new counterpart will not be so grandmotherly and patient. The student is literally told to walk into communicative crisis.

To take an example from the oral tradition of Korean Ch'an, there was once a monk who had been practicing meditation with great zeal and diligence for many years but who had still not divested himself of his impediments to awakening. Thinking that the life of the monastery was distracting him from penetrating the great matter of enlightenment, he decided to ask his master for permission to go off on a long, solo retreat. The master made a show of deliberating for a few moments and then nodded. The monk was sent to stay in a hermitage owned by an elderly widow--an acquaintance and, it would seem, a long-time accomplice of the master. There, the monk redoubled his efforts

at meditation, convinced that he would soon be able to break through the clouds of his delusion.

Every morning, the old woman would send her granddaughter up the winding trail to the hermitage with food for the monk. And every morning she would return full of praises for the depth and uninterruptedness of his discipline, recounting how he never so much as lifted an eyebrow when she entered and how on even the coldest mornings he always wore the same thin robe. Fall turned to winter, winter to spring, and when wildflowers began to dot the sunny side of the valley, the old woman decided to give the monk a chance to demonstrate his attainment.

She instructed her granddaughter to try engaging the monk in conversation, to speak about herself, her dreams, and her worry that they might never come true. The monk had remained silent throughout the young woman's visit, and she again had nothing but praises for their guest. Grandma, however, was clearly disturbed. Go back tomorrow, she said, and this time be more persistent. Sit right beside him and tell him that you have come to love him and that you wish he would marry you. If he still doesn't respond, try kissing him and ask what he's going to do about it. With some trepidation, the granddaughter did as she was told and was profoundly impressed when the monk remained steadfastly in meditative repose, even when she brushed her lips against his cheek. Asking him what he was going to do, he quietly and somewhat poetically said, "a burned-out log in deep winter snow."

The girl took this as a great virtue and happily reported the whole encounter to her grandmother who responded by storming up the hill, pulling the monk out of the hermitage by his ear and sending him tumbling down the path with a well-placed kick, reviling him as a worthless impostor while she set the hut on fire, burning it completely to the ground.[29]

In holding himself like an ice-encrusted, fire-hollowed log, the monk is acting out an image of nirvana as quiet extinction--as the complete absence of even the possibility of the arising of passion. The burned-out log, firm outside and hollow within, represents his (still Indian-influenced) conception of attaining emptiness or selflessness. Looking like good material for a fire, the log is in fact quite useless, and while the monk may look to the young girl like good material for a husband, he is in fact impervious to temptation. Almost as if he were not a man at all, he remains aloof from her charms, rigidly adhering to his precepts. This he takes as Buddhist virtue. But in the old widow's eyes, this is simply a convenient story absolving the monk of the difficulties involved in really dealing with whatever comes in front of him. By saying he is like a burned-out log in winter snow, the monk is saying that he has nothing to give her granddaughter, no help, not even a word or two of real understanding. Having nothing to offer, the monk has nothing to lose and so is in no position to be able to enter into an intimate relationship. Far from being able to respond with virtuosity, he is able only to put her off, to deny her access. In a word, he separates himself from her, looking on the outside like a sincere Buddhist practitioner, but inside as desolate and bereft of real compassion as the site of a burned-down cottage.

By identifying himself with the cold indifference and uselessness of the burned-out log, the monk not only asserts his disparity with the girl, he ruthlessly cleaves their narrative into 'his' and 'hers', reducing it to a discourse which will carry him further along the path of sagely and meditative stillness and leave her to be swept along the way of the commoner. Taking meditation as his practice, the monk refuses to be drawn into the girl's life or to take her fully into his own. Their relationship remains wholly societal--she is just someone who brings his food, nothing more or less. But his distinction of 'sage' and 'commoner' is ultimately destructive of the very foundations of the bodhisattva life. Not

only does it leave the young woman's needs unanswered, it secures the monk, insuring his safety--the safety of his 'self', his identity as 'monk'.

In refusing to relate intimately with the girl, the monk enforces their difference, projecting a horizon within which he does his 'practice' and outside of which she carries on in the life of a layperson. In refusing to accept responsibility for her feelings, he blinds himself to the meaning of their meeting and the shared karma this reveals. Finally, in refusing to accord with the situation and respond directly to her need, he makes a virtue out of his unreadiness to realize enlightenment and open up the wondrously unlimited meaning of true sociality.

CHAPTER 8

OPENING THE FIELD OF VIRTUOSITY: RELINQUISHING ALL HORIZONS

Earlier we noted that it is only persons who practice, never isolated individuals. With practice, it is not necessarily our individual behaviour which is transformed, but **conduct**--narrative movement and meaning. While it is certainly more comfortable to continue imagining otherwise, this is as much as to say that the value or meaning of practice can never be determined by an exclusive analysis of the quality of our own experience. Regardless of the insights or revelations we may obtain, the vows we may take and scrupulously honor, the changes of lifestyle we may undergo, whether or not we are practicing Ch'an can be assessed only with reference to the changing complexion of our entire narration. As the bodhisattva ideal makes quite clear, whether or not 'i' become a 'buddha' is practically irrelevant. What matters is not 'my' salvation or even the salvation of particular 'others', but the liberation of all things, of the entire world apart from which none of us has any existence.

The root illusion under which most of us labor is the belief that liberation has something to do with independence, with having no necessary connection with anyone or anything else. At bottom, it is because of this fundamental arrogance on the part of the monk and the parsimoniousness it implied that the old widow burned down his hermitage. Believing that he can, even must attain enlightenment on his own, the monk conserves his energy (*ch'i*[B]), presenting a cold and indifferent exterior and removing himself from the concursive demands of social life to concentrate exclusively on his 'spiritual' development. He decides, in short, to not share himself, and--barring the intervention of some 'distraction' like the widow and her granddaughter--the energy he

stores up by doing so will eventually trigger off an experiential breakthrough. This will undoubtedly be seen as a mark of success, but when the old habits of perception and feeling reassert themselves--and they almost invariably do--he will be compelled to try corroborating the initial breakthrough. More energy will be hoarded and his difference from others will become greater and greater.

Stiff and puffed up with the pride that comes from feeling so much energy held in one place at one time, the monk may become a meditative adept, may even attain the classic marks (*siddhis*) of those who have developed supernatural powers. But all this can only happen at the expense of the rest of his narrative. Making and maintaining any kind of distinction requires the diversion and retention of energy that would otherwise circulate freely and hence be generally available for the creative resolution of unexpected crises. Novel meanings will remain unrealized even as our narrative as a whole stagnates. Stored or blocked energy becomes power, and with that come further distinctions--those who have and do not have, who know and do not know, who are able and who are not able. It means, in effect, the degeneration of a world.

The Mahayana belief that the Dharma will undergo an extended period of decline is thus quite distinct from the Hindu belief in an objective cycle of world ages. The degeneration of the Dharma is not due to factors beyond individual control but is precisely the result of individuals gaining and refusing to relinquish control of the flow of natural energy, diverting it instead into the continuous maintenance of distinctions--the most harmful being that between the 'enlightened' and the 'unenlightened'. Ch'an is the recognition that this age will come to a close only when each of us realizes that no 'one' is ever truly enlightened and that the greatest service we can perform is to carry out Lin-chi's famous injunction: "If you meet the 'buddha', kill him." (T 1985.500b)

A. Forgetting the 'Self': *Ch'an* Overtures.

It is for this reason that in answering a question about the five kinds of dharma bodies, Pai-chang concludes that "not having attainments and evidence is precisely evidence of the Buddha-dharma dharma body." (HTC 119.422b) Having no attainments and no proof of achievement in practice is simply the wondrous function (*miao yung*) of the great ocean mirror samadhi in which nothing is rejected and nothing retained. By contrast, "if someone possesses 'proofs' and 'attainments', [we should] regard them as evidence of his/her being an arrogant person (*tseng-shang-man-jen*[A]) with false views." (HTC 119.422b) For the Chinese Buddhist, people like this literally "add on" (*tseng-shang*) "slowness" (*man*), retarding the natural course of events and inhibiting others through their own acquisition of power. In contemporary slang, we would say that an arrogant person is "a drag"--someone who robs any situation he or she is in of the energy necessary to open up its truth.

And so, in the same way that the success of a musical improvisation is a function of how sensitively all the musicians involved listen to and play with one another, whether or not we are actually practicing Ch'an is never simply a function of our individual streams of consciousness (our solos) or even of the general level of expertise we bring to playing out our karma (our chosen instrument), but whether what we are playing accords with and augments the contributions of everyone else involved in our narration. It is, in fact, quite possible to experience a marked increase in our level of distress upon entering the practice life in earnest since this spontaneous reorientation of our narration as often as not requires the release of as much blocked energy as possible for the benefit of others and ultimately for our relationships with them. This humbling of the 'self' typically leaves the ego feeling deflated if not completely baffled--certain that something is unpredictably and perhaps uncontrollably getting out of hand. Doubts arise about the efficacy of

practice, about the trustworthiness of the master, about the whole project of attaining enlightenment. And yet it is only if the practitioner is able at this point to refrain from reinforcing his or her distinctions and resist the desire to wrest back control of events that the true meaning of Ch'an can manifest.

In other words, the practitioner must be willing to 'do' nothing at all, to allow his or her life to proceed unchecked. Like a piece of improvised music, practice is something other than the sum of its individually experienced, factual parts, and there are times when the part 'we' play in it seems so infinitesimal as to be no part at all. To use a musical analogy, practice sometimes puts us in the position of playing the same simple rhythmic pattern again and again to provide an open expanse of time and space on which others can solo and express their freedom. There is no glamour in this, no exalted sense of individual accomplishment, and yet it is precisely what is needed at times for the music to come fully to life. When this happens, our simple contribution is heard in a completely new and always unanticipated way, becoming something much more sublime than we could ever have imagined. In the same way, as long as we are fully engaged in practicing Ch'an, even though we may from an objective point of view be doing nothing out of the ordinary, the meaning of our activity--our conduct--is undergoing continual transformation. Even though we are doing nothing special, our relationships become progressively more open and truthful.[1]

In this light, Ma-tsu's declaration that "ordinary mind is Tao" (*p'ing-ch'ang-hsin-shih*^{C}*-tao*) (TTC 45.406a) cannot be reduced to a histrionic bit of iconoclasm, but must be recognized as a practical reminder that the true Tao of Buddhism is always right in front of us and that there is no need to pick and choose our experiences to guide ourselves out of ignorance. To the contrary, it is picking and choosing that lies at the root of our confusion and continued bondage. We have all had the experience of trying to act

differently or better only to discover that it does no good--our relationships still falter and collapse, we encounter the 'same' difficulties again and again, the same sense of being stuck. Even though we change jobs, move to another city, make new friends and lovers, we find ourselves repeating the 'same mistakes', suffering the 'same injustices'. In Buddhist terms, our karma remains undigested no matter how much we change our circumstances.

According to Ch'an, this impasse is resolved only when 'we' relinquish control and allow our narrative as a whole to open up. Then, even if we don't do anything differently, our relationships become progressively clearer (*ming*), less sticky, less characterized by misunderstanding and feelings of loneliness, frustration or conflict. This is the meaning behind Ma-tsu insisting that ordinary mind--the mind of a buddha--is "not making anything (*wu-tsao-tso*), not affirming or denying, not grasping or rejecting, not annihilating or eternalizing, not being 'common' and not being 'sage'." (TTC 45.406a) In short, ordinary mind is realising the complete relaxation referred to as "no-'mind'"--the relinquishing of all karma-generating and necessarily discursive dispositions.[2] Then:

> whether in robes (lay life) or cassock (ordained life), sitting and rising follow one another and the precepts and cultivation are an added perfume that accumulates in pure karmas/deeds...Neither cultivating nor sitting is the Tathagata's pure and clear ch'an. Right now if you see this principle and are truly correct, you won't create any karma and will pass your life content with your lot...If you're simply able to be like this, what worries are not penetrated?" (TTC 45.407a)

Strictly speaking, striving to bring about such an unmitigatedly relaxed condition is inconceivable. The function of conception is to make distinctions useful in our ongoing efforts to control experience and hence always implies a point of view, an 'agent' or 'experiencer' who will engineer and benefit from the regulation of his or her environment. But in "rejecting phenomena so as to preserve the order of things, people don't realize that it is 'mind' (set dispositions) that obstructs (hinders the opening of) horizons, and the

'order of things' that obstructs phenomena." (T 2012.382a) Making no distinctions is tantamount to doing nothing at all for our 'selves'--a way of neglecting the center of gravity around which our karma revolves like a vast system of comets. If the center does not hold, the events, people and things which we have been drawing back lifetime after lifetime are all at once liberated.

It should come as no surprise, then, that when he was asked for the significance of the term "middle path," Pai-chang replied that it means "boundaries" (*pien*). After all, "if there were no boundaries (no horizons), from whence would the 'middle' come to be?" (HTC 119.424b) If we didn't project likes and dislikes--external or objective 'things' we crave and detest--there could be no 'middle path'. All that would remain is the campestrial generosity of an oceanic mind which selects nothing. Realising horizonless intimacy through systematically relinquishing all impediments to social virtuosity, the practitioner of Ch'an undertakes to refuse nothing on principle, to project no distinctions which will cause the narration of which they are a part to splinter into mutually exclusive subjects and objects. "When a bodhisattva's mind is like the empty sky, every-'thing' is entirely relinquished"--that is, no horizons remain, no possibility of marking some 'thing' or 'individual' off from everything else and saying what it 'is':

> Then, there is nothing to grasp, nothing to push away. In accordance with the situation, you respond to things and 'agent' and 'acted upon' are both forgotten. This is great relinquishing...[it is] like a blazing torch right in front of you so that there's nothing further of 'delusion' or 'enlightenment'. (T 2012.382a)

With no shadow of 'self' remaining in what lies before us, enlightenment--the meaning of practice--is simply the realization of true (*cheng*) and clear (*ming*) relationship with others.

B. The Modes of Ch'an Practice.

1. Tun-wu: *Relinquishing All Horizons to Readiness.*

It is clear from Huang-po's characterization of the great relinquishing (*ta she*[A]) as "according with your situation and responding as needed" that it is not merely a putting away or release--a kind of rejection--but entails in addition an offering or giving, a spirit of concern. In fact, the Chinese term *she* not only suggests parting with something, but includes the sense of bestowal, the giving of alms. In short, the great relinquishing can be seen as an unhindered embodiment of *dānapāramitā*--as freely entering the gate of Ch'an enlightenment. Since what we are giving up in this great relinquishing are not the tools of our trades, our food or our relationships with others, but rather all forms or distinctions (*hsiang*), our offering is not of anything in particular but rather of the energy that has until now been locked up in the habitual maintenance of 'self', 'other', 'good', 'evil' and so on. With the release of this energy, we signal our manifest readiness for creating a pure land--for living the bodhisattva life.[3]

This suggests that the central doctrine of Ch'an--the teaching of *tun wu*[B] or what is usually translated as "sudden awakening"--is not a declaration of fact about the nature of enlightenment or the speed with which it is attained, but is rather a verbalization of the core practice of Ch'an. If enlightenment is not to be identified with any particular experience but is instead given in conduct or narrative movement as a great relinquishing, taking *tun* as a primarily temporal indicator would seem inappropriate. In fact, Hui-neng--traditionally regarded as the first proponent of the "sudden teaching"--makes it quite clear that it is not the dharma which is sudden (*tun*) or gradual (*chien*), but people who are keen (*li*[C]) or dull (*tun*[A]). (PS 16) That is, the distinction being made is dispositional, not temporal.[4] Some people are slow--reluctant to entirely divest themselves of the

discriminations which retard the natural digestion of their karma--and effectively inhibit the clearing of their narrative, deferring enlightenment by continuing to make decisions and act on the basis of their habits for 'what works'. Others are *li*^{B}--people who are willing and clever enough to presently reap the fruit of their deeds, to accept and digest their karma and free all the energy which has until now been kept bound up in them.[5]

Thus, *tun-wu*^{B} seems best translated not as "sudden awakening," but as the "readiness to awaken." In fact, the character *tun* has the primary connotation of bowing the head, putting in order, preparing. It signals the moment when we humble ourselves like a servant accepting his or her instructions and lower our head in unconditional assent. According to Pai-chang, "*Tun* is the readiness to do away with misleading thoughts"--thoughts that lead us to neglect what is right before us. "*Wu*^{B} is awakening to the absence of anything to be attained"--and, by implication, of anyone who attains. The recommended method for accomplishing this is *ting* or "responding to circumstances with no-'mind' (*tui-ching-wu-hsin*)," (HTC 119.420b) with no set or habitual dispositions. In short, far from indicating a flash of insight or an instantaneous achievement of liberation, *tun-wu*^{B} should be seen as wholeheartedly placing ourselves in the service of our entire narration or world, as relinquishing all horizons for readiness.[6]

Nowhere is this more forcefully articulated than in the teachings of Lin-chi. Adamantly insisting that he has nothing to give anyone, Lin-chi constantly challenges his students to develop the confidence (*hsin*^{A}) needed to be able to become the master of any situation, to be able to respond without any hesitation to whatever comes their way. Any form of seeking is a waste of time that only makes more karma and more deeply enmeshes us in the habits already strangling our original nature, and any hesitation or doubt is a blockage to the free flow of energy on which the resolution of narrative interruptions depends:

If you doubt even for an instant, the demon Mara will enter your mind. When a bodhisattva has even a moment of doubt, the demons of birth and death take the advantage. But if you're able to stop thinking (attain no-'mind') and moreover don't search outwardly for anything, things just come and are illuminated (*chao*). (T 1985.499a)

Dispensing with all the usual worries that impede our readiness to respond freely to the needs of others, "there is nothing that is not profound, nothing that is not liberation." (T 1985.497c) As Hui-neng puts it, when the mind dwells on no-'thing', the Tao freely circulates (*tao-chi*^{C}*-t'ung-liu*) (PS 14) and there is nothing special that needs to be done. So even if we are unable to see our own natures, we need only "give rise to *prajña* and illuminate with it and in the briefest instant all delusive thoughts are eliminated." (PS 31) Nothing else is necessary.

Relinquishing our horizons to readiness is thus the practical or functional equivalent of giving rise to *prajña*--defined by Hui-neng as *chih*^{A}*-hui*, where *chih*^{A} is wisdom or being capable of conducting oneself in an appropriate manner and where *hui* carries a range of connotations including favor, benefit, conferring kindness, according with, and being gracious. As both Lin-chi's and Hui-neng's use of the term *chao* ("to illuminate" or "reflect," but also "to look after" or "care for") suggests, *prajña* is the radiantly careful offering of all that comes our way--the realization of the great, round mirror wisdom that receives everything without any discrimination and which without any hesitation or holding back brightly reflects or returns it. Seen in this light, the great relinquishing cannot be a self-centered experience of releasing what is no longer desired, but is realized as an understanding kindness or wise beneficence--not something attained or discarded, but a luminous offering of profoundest compassion.

2. Wei^{A}-hsin: ***Relinquishing All Horizons for Responsibility.***

Now, in addition to this great relinquishing, Huang-po also refers to middle and lower "levels" of relinquishing and it is important to ask whether these three form a

comprehensive and necessary system--with relinquishing our horizons for readiness as the chief (*t'ou*)--or if they represent a hierarchy of independent and disparately valued types of Buddhist practice. In other words are the three relinquishings an integral system of practice or are they to be seen as separate practices appropriate for people of different roots (*ken*) or capacities? Huang-po's use of the terms "middle" and "lower" would certainly seem to suggest the latter interpretation, but granted the often remarked upon tendency among those uninitiated into the true meaning of Ch'an to identify practice with sitting meditation and the realization of emptiness, it is possible that Huang-po's hierarchy is really nothing more than a corrective or cautionary device and not necessarily reflective of an actual superiority or independence of great relinquishing as opposed to the 'middle' and 'lower' forms.

At the very least, it would seem to be the case that we would be disinclined to offer our distinctions and ultimately our 'selves' up to others if we had no reason to believe that this would help to correct or alleviate their difficulties. That is, unless we had reason to feel in some way responsible for the needs of others--unless we saw a connection between or interdependence of our distinctions and their ills--the great relinquishing would occur in a vacuum and prove futile except as a means of either disemburdening ourselves of karmic baggage and attaining an individual liberation or of satisfying a need 'we' have to feel helpful. In either case, 'you' and 'i' would remain central to the practice of Ch'an and the act of relinquishing our horizons for readiness in the service of others would not lead to unimpeded, liberating intimacy, but to precisely the kind of egotism that Subhuti was explicitly warned against by the Buddha. In short, if our readiness to humble our selves in the service of others is based on a distinction of their suffering and its causes and our own, we will not yet have grasped the true principle of

Ch'an. The great relinquishing can arise only on the basis of a relinquishing of all horizons for responsibility.

This, in fact, seems to be the import of the middle level of relinquishing. Huang-po says, "If on the one hand you practice the way to manifest virtue and on the other hand you turn around and relinquish it and have no hope in mind--that is the middle relinquishing." (T 2012.382a) The key phrase here is "manifesting virtue (*pu-te*)." One of the most profound concepts in Chinese thought, *te* has a constellation of meanings ranging from virtue, power, energy, and conduct, to bounty and the repayment of kindness. Unlike the Indo-european conception of energy or power as a value-neutral component of all change or motion, *te* is seen as performing an irreducibly integrative and positively evaluated function. Far from being seen as a gathering of energy which sets one further apart from others and tends to result in the arrogance of 'power', an increase of *te* brings one into a closer and ultimately more bountiful harmony with one's world. Thus, in the explicitly humanistic context of the Confucian tradition, *te* is said to be accumulated whenever we articulate our persons by doing our best, living up to our word, and taking excellence in adapting to what is appropriate as our primary concern. Neatly phrased, "*Te* is never isolated, but necessarily has neighbors." (A IV.25) With the accumulation or manifestation of *te* we come into deeper and more extensive relationship not only with other men, women and children, but with heaven *(t'ien)* and all that lies below it.

Lao-tzu takes this basic notion to its conceptual limit and claims that with an abundance of *te* we become like new-born infants--persons who as yet mark no difference between 'self' and 'world', mine and yours. (LT 55) One of the effects of this is, of course, a lack of discrimination between what I have done and am responsible for and what has

and must be done by others. With an increase of *te*, more energy flows into and through us and this has the consequence of linking our particular manners of being in such a way that our fates (*ming*[A]) become progressively more dependent upon one another. Thus, Lao-tzu later remarks that, "The person of *te* takes charge of the tally (*szu-ch'i*[A])"--accepting full responsibility for carrying out the system of obligations symbolized by the tally, while "the person without it manages the collecting"--is concerned only with what they can get. (LT 79) As Ames and Hall point out (1987:223), for the Taoist, the integration of a particular *te* with the *tao* is a function of "acting naturally" or what we have referred to as conduct without precedent (*wu-wei*)--conduct that is spontaneous and complete (*tzu-jan*), disemburdened of hope, uncontaminated by the calculated divisiveness of ends and means. Not making anything, the person of *te* expresses the *tao* with unselfconscious virtuosity, freely improvising with--and hence becoming inseparable from--whatever comes his or her way.

Thus, in the Confucian and Taoist traditions that provided the ritual and conceptual contexts for the Chinese appropriation of Buddhism, manifesting *te* entails an active extension of our responsibility for what happens. In this light, Huang-po's constant reference to enlightenment as a "silent bond" (*mei-ch'i*[A]) takes on a more dynamic and narrative cast. Since realising the great, round mirror wisdom means receiving and reflecting whatever comes our way, a buddha can be seen as a focus of universal energy--a person through whom all things flow unimpeded. Like the ocean which takes in all water no matter how clear or muddy, a buddha in effect refuses to disown any karma or narrative movement--refuses to say: "That belongs to your story, your tally, is your doing, your problem and not mine." Like the Confucian or Taoist person endowed with great *te*, a buddha is best seen as a limitlessly integrative and harmonizing focus of both energy and the conduct in which it is articulated--in short, a person through whom the

interdependence and intimacy of all things is quietly and unprecedentedly realized. Unlike a selfishly centered individual who constantly divorces himself from others by claiming that 'they' are to blame for this or that state of affairs, a buddha realizes everything as the wondrous functioning (*miao yung*) of one-mind.[7] No matter what happens, it is entirely oneself (*tzu chia*, literally "one's own family"), one's own doing (*karma*). (TTC 45.406b)

As Huang-po puts it, when we realize that we are one-mind, "wriggling beings and all the buddhas and bodhisattvas are a single body and do not differ." (T 2012.380b) But if the least shred of ego remains, this body will inevitably seem to be 'mine' and the virtue or energy flowing through it will seem to need directing--a vector along which we can extend our 'selves', perhaps even for the 'good' of 'others'. In short, we will fall prey to the lures of power and persist in acting *yu-wei*. To the precise extent that we indulge in this decision-making--in asking which course of action is right and which ones wrong--we sunder the one-mind and continually give birth to the two-mindedness of doubt. In the end, and no matter how altruistic our motives may be, this means that our attention will necessarily be directed first to resolving our own doubts--to making further distinctions of one sort or another--and not responding directly to the needs of 'others'. Instead of integrating all things, the *te* we manifest or spread will serve only to intensify our separateness and the fragile certitude of our discriminations. That is, by focusing on our 'selves' and the doubts troubling them, we interiorize our concern and necessarily move apart from others. The very conceptualizing done in trying to determine or identify what is best for others necessarily places us at a distance from them, be it spatial, temporal, or metaphysical.[8] Hence the insistence in Huang-po's middle relinquishing that we literally disown the virtue we have accumulated--actively departing not only from the distinction between 'what is' and 'what might be' that lies at the root of all that is merely hopeful, but

from the illusion that 'we' can engineer the betterment of circumstances thought of as not our own. Only in this way can we free up the energy hitherto expended in the continual maintenance of our 'selves'.

By relinquishing our horizons for responsibility we not only take on the karmic burdens of others and realize an intimacy with them that is so profound as to render all distinctions between us purely conventional, we begin to understand that nothing separates who we are from all that comes to be. Ultimately, we are responsible for the entirety of our narration--our world--and not only for whatever we have consciously contrived to bring about in this life. It is in this spirit that Ma-tsu insists that "the three realms are only mind" and that "everything that is seen as form is [actually just] seeing mind." (TTC 45.406a) In short, our dispositions are implicated in everything that happens. There are no 'things' existing apart from our intention and doing.

Since both Shen-hsiu's verse and Hui-neng's famous rebuttal were written on walls destined to be painted with scenes from the Lankavatara Sutra, the watershed between the so-called Northern and Southern (gradual and sudden) schools can arguably be traced to differences in the meaning of the Lankavatara's central doctrine of mind-only (*wei*[A]*-hsin*). Whereas Shen-hsiu takes the separate or independant existence of pollutants as given and sees our task as practioners to be the continual cleansing of our minds so that they can function in an enlightened manner, Hui-neng denies the validity of any discrimination between our nature and these 'dusts'. After declaring that buddha nature--the nature of our own minds--is constantly pure and clear, he seems to raise his hands in a gesture of rhetorical dismay and asks, "Where is there dust?" (PS 8) While Shen-hsiu implicitly affirms a kind of dualism, seeing mind and dust as sufficiently distinct for the latter to be able to be said to cover or obscure the former, Hui-neng realizes that this

effectively cuts us off from ourselves. By divorcing ourselves from the 'dust' of the world we perform the root scission from which the disparity of 'you' and 'i' is born.

Thus, when asked how laypersons in particular are to practice Ch'an, the pivot of Hui-neng's response is that we must cease making differences between what we are responsible for and what we are not. "A true cultivator of the Tao does not see any errors in the world. If you see wrongs in the world, it is your own wrongs that are affirmed. We are to blame for the wrongs of others just as we are to blame for our own." (PS 36) In short, there is no aspect of our narration in which we can legitimately claim to have had no part. As persons in the full narrative sense, splitting up responsibility for the ills of this life is tantamount to a willfully induced schizophrenia which not only fractures our world (interrupts our narrative), but makes it virtually impossible to truly communicate with one another, to enter into unhindered concourse. This is the profound impetus behind Huang-po's claim that, "All the Buddhas and all sentient beings are just one-mind (*i-hsin*), and beyond this there is no other teaching." This one-mind "rises beyond all boundaries, calculations, names, words, traces and attitudes. It is [your] present body/self and that's all." (T 2012.379c)

3. K'ung: *Relinquishing All Horizons for Relevance.*

Now, one of the standard accusations aimed at Buddhist proponents of the doctrine of mind-only is that it leads to affirming the independent existence of mind and forces us into a subjective idealism incompatible with the Buddha's teaching of selflessness. This indeed follows logically, but only where the relationship between mind and 'things' is seen as linearly causal and not karmic. To be sure, if 'things' are the effect of mind and if mind is not effected in return by 'things', the doctrine of mind-only would amount to a substantialist reduction--an assertion of 'what really is'. Whether this is called "mind" or "buddha-nature" or "substance" is finally irrelevant. The practical danger in

each case is the profound ignorance involved in allowing our own minds to settle on one 'thing' as ultimately or unconditionally real. But if it is understood that nothing can be identified as the basis of reality--that all things are impermanent and hence in constant evolution, unborn and yet having already come to be--what matters is simply the manner in which things come together, the quality of their interdependence. What is real is not 'mind' or 'matter', but the values embodied in the orientations and movement of our narratives--what we have referred to as conduct.

Given this, it is significant that Hui-neng is said to have attained enlightenment upon hearing Hung-jen reading the passage of the Diamond Sutra in which the Buddha tells Subhuti that we give birth to a pure and clear mind by having "nothing on which the mind dwells (*wu-suo-chu*)." (T 235.749c) Only in this way can we avoid identifying mind and making it into some 'thing' opposed to all others--the imagined, central axis on which the world turns. To dwell on any 'thing' is to stop (*chu*) improvising, to resist the impermanence of things, and such a willful imposition of constraints on our concourse with others cannot but selfishly divert the natural circulation of energy into the creation of karmic patterns which we may initially take to be evidence of our freedom but which in fact serve only to more and more deeply enmesh us in the network of horizons cast by our distinctions. As the Diamond Sutra makes clear, the only sure way beyond bondage as a distinction-generating and generated self is the refusal to accept any limit to inquiry as final--to eschew any appeal to the dichotomy of 'is' and 'is-not'. In short, the possibility of successfully relinquishing all horizons for responsibility depends on the practice of emptiness (*k'ung*).

According to Huang-po, the lower [level of] relinquishing occurs when "you extensively cultivate a great many excellent qualities in the hope of attaining something and upon hearing the dharma realize emptiness and are then unattached." (T 2012.382a)

For example, you may wish to acquire a good birth in the next life and to that end cultivate a kind and generous attitude, having been convinced that this is the best route to achieving your end. While there is nothing inherently wrong with acting kindly and generously, taking it as an inviolable principle of appropriate or correct behaviour is to make it into something fixed and inflexible which cannot but limit our ability to respond to others as needed. There are times, for instance, when a parent must show stern disapproval and refuse to be leveraged by pleading and tears into bending the rules "one last time." In other words, complete virtuosity--living the bodhisattva life--can arise only when 'good' and 'evil' are emptied, when our conduct is constrained by no set forms and we are free of all predetermined ends. Ultimately, of course, this is nothing other than the practice of the middle path--the avoidance of the conflict which necessarily comes about as a result of opposite thinking or the maintenance of set views (*dṛṣṭi*).[9] Huang-po's lower or primary level of relinquishing can thus be seen as the realization (*chih*) of the Madhyamika doctrine of the emptiness of all forms.

We can begin exploring the practical implications of this by noting that insofar as the problem identified by Huang-po is not the selection of a false view of things, but the selection of **any** view as an abiding pretext for our conduct, the lower relinquishing is not a weeding out process--the removal of unwanted or wrong views and forms--but a realization of the unobstructed mind-ground (*hsin-ti*) of our original nature. As Huang-po makes quite clear, "mind is originally emptiness" (T 2012.382a), and the root problem of views is not a function of content, but of the horizon-making structure of having a view at all--the fixed segregation of knowing subject and known object, the 'one' who grasps and what is grasped.

Given that we develop views as distillations of and then guides for the strategies by means of which we have coped with the various challenges of being human, and given

that the primary inspiration for the Madhyamika doctrine of emptiness is the Buddha's declaration of the selflessness of all things, it cannot be consistently maintained that views and the concepts on which they pivot are inherently bad or misleading. For example, marking a distinction between food and poison is not intrinsically problematic, but is so only when it becomes a fixed barrier to further inquiry or creativity--a barrier that may make it impossible to discover medicinal or more generally therapeutic uses for what has until now only been associated with harm. As long as our concepts remain flexible and heuristic in nature, they simply represent dependently arisen forms of inquiry which may be judiciously used in the service of our creative intelligence.

However, in the event that we lose sight of the conventional nature of conception, it is possible for our concepts and the views depending on them to harden into habitual and rigid (i.e., absolute) forms of discrimination, often below the threshold of conscious experience. Such habitual forms of thought, feeling and behaviour are referred to in the early Buddhist tradition as *saṃskāra*--the fourth of the five *skandhas* or "aggregates" included in the psychophysical system of human being. Often translated as "dispositions," but perhaps more forcefully and accurately rendered as "impulses," the early tradition did not see *saṃskāras* as simple inclinations or paths of least resistance, but as drivers of confused (*musa*) or ignorant (*āvidya*) reactions. Thus Nagarjuna remarks that *saṃskāra* lie at the very basis of both confusion (MK 13.1) and ignorance (MK 26.11).

Interestingly, the Chinese use the same character (*hsing*) to stand for *saṃskāra* as they use for practice and conduct, graphically indicating that the problem with the former is not a matter of nature or content, but habituation--their function as regulators of conduct. There are two important implications of this. First, instead of being seen as different in kind, *saṃskāras* and enlightened conduct are understood as qualitatively distinct--the former orienting conduct toward regularity, the latter toward spontaneous

responsivity. *Saṃskāras* are not seen as problematic because they are not useful, but only because they tend to reinforce and even to precipitate societal and not social orientations in conduct. Secondly, since the conception of conduct in China is inseparable from a consideration of the relational context in which it arises, *saṃskāras* are not seen as drivers of individual or private activity, but as compelling distortions of interpersonality.[10]

Such compulsions are not, of course, equivalent to views, but do constitute a primary condition for their arising. If we take the 12-fold chain of dependent origination to heart, it would seem that the fossilization of the forms of inquiry into set dispositions is itself dependent on ignorance (*āvidya*) which may be rendered as a not-seeing of the mutual relevance of things. Thus, we find Nagarjuna stating that, "When ignorance ceases, there is no occurrence of dispositions. However, the cessation of that ignorance takes place as a result of the practice of that [non-occurrence] through wisdom (*prajñā*)." (MK 26.11) Since Nagarjuna asserts that when self-nature exists (or is taken to exist) the practice of the path is not appropriate (MK 24.24), and since he invariably associates self-nature with a commitment to the reality of both identity and difference (see MK 14.7), the practice of the non-occurrence of dispositions can be seen as vigilantly relinquishing all discriminating boundaries as they arise. Moreover, insofar as Nagarjuna elsewhere alerts us to the dependence of discrimination on obsessive or habitual thinking (*prapañca*) (MK 18.5), and since he claims that *prapañca* ceases in the context of emptiness, emptiness itself should be seen as the relinquishing of all fixed distinctions--what in Ch'an is referred to as *wu-nien* or non-thinking.

That the culprit is not thinking in the most general sense, but habitual thinking is suggested by the use of *nien* which means thinking in the sense of remembering or recalling and also means chanting--the regular repetition of set phrases or verses for the

purpose of inculcating a fixed frame of mental or spiritual reference. Thus, Pai-chang claims that "*wu-nien* is the absence of errant thoughts. It's not the absence of corrective thinking." This he goes on to define in terms of thought which does not posit 'being' (*yu*) and 'non-being' (*wu*). (HTC 119.421a) Indeed, corrective thinking is free of all duality and is "the enlightenment (*bodhi*) of thought." Asked whether *bodhi* can then be attained, Pai-chang replies that it cannot and is taken to task for talking about the enlightenment of thought. He responds by noting that it's as if *bodhi* were falsely established and designated by a written character when in fact it can neither be attained nor thought about. "Just this absence of thinking is called 'truly thinking of bodhi as the absence of anything to think about.' The absence of anything to think about is in all situations to have no-'mind'." (HTC 119.421a)

That is, non-thinking refers to the practice of emptiness (*k'ung*)--a departure from formal and habitual mental constructs, not from mentation or the having of dispositions in general. Hence Hui-neng's warning that "if you do not think of the myriad things, but always cause your thoughts to be cut off, you will be bound (and not liberated) by the Dharma." (PS 31) Emptiness is not the blank insentience of a stone or a burned-out log, but a compassionate refusal to ignore what is immediately present by interposing a deflecting screen of stock concepts, memories and regularity-tempered views. Moreover, since the Chinese Buddhist understanding of thinking was not that it was primarily a psychological process but a phase in our conduct, the attainment of correct thought--thought that has been trued by the practice of emptiness--should be seen as the realization of harmonious conduct or what Huang-po has termed "one-mind" or *i-hsin*. Errant thought, then, cannot be construed as thinking which doesn't somehow match with an objective reality that it is **about**, but as the manifestation of dispositions which interrupt the free flow of narration.

Now, while it is the case that *prapañca* ceases in the context of emptiness, according to Nagarjuna's Madhyamika so does selective relevance. "Everything is relevant for whom emptiness is relevant. Everything is not relevant for whom the empty is not relevant." (MK 24.14) In the context of the Ch'an articulation of emptiness as *wu-nien*, this means that obsessive thinking (*prapañca*) ceases when we stop selecting (PC 36) and checking (MT p.5) what occurs--that is, when we relinquish control and with it the 'self' whose likes and dislikes that control is intended to serve. Instead of trying to decide what is relevant to achieving our aims and what is not and thereby insuring a continuing role for the ego as an arbitrator of alternative courses of action, with the practice of emptiness or *wu-nien* we relinquish all horizons for relevance and shift our attention entirely toward our narration as a whole--that is, not toward 'self' and not toward 'other', but toward the creative realization of truly meaningful relationship.

C. The System of *Ch'an*.

Thus far, we have articulated a chain of dependence whereby Huang-po's great relinquishing can arise only on the basis of the middle form, and that form only on the basis of the lower. But if these three are to be seen as a comprehensive system of Ch'an practice, the dependencies cannot be uni-directional. After all, if that were the case, we would have nothing more than a simple series. not a system as such--a whole with characteristics not entailed by those of its parts taken together or in isolation.

As has just been suggested. it is possible to look at emptiness as the practice of relinquishing all views and not merely this view or that. In terms of the two truths doctrine of the Madhyamika, engaging in creating the distinctions needed to decide which views are (for example) workable is certainly pragmatic, but it is true or corrective only in a conventional sense--that is, at the level of *saṃvṛti*. Granted that conventions serve to co-ordinate the conduct of a given community within a given context. while *saṃvṛti* may

involve seeing in a new and liberating way and hence extending of the range of what we have hitherto considered relevant, it is not necessarily critical of prevailing conditions. In short, conventional truths are specifically oriented toward the institution of new horizons that may serve only to enhance or shift the focus of existing societal norms and not to encourage the spontaneity of *wu-wei*.[11] By comparison, *paramārtha* (the ultimate fruit) is the co-ordinative and hence communicative working of truth into all contexts, the relinquishing of all limits to what is considered relevant--whether in resolving a crisis or in carrying out our day-to-day affairs. Since the position of the Madhyamika is that all things are empty or dependently arisen and hence not-born and not-annihilated, there can be no question of *paramārtha* amounting to finally ending ignorance or suffering once and for all. The middle path is not a destination-oriented project, but a continuous, unlimited endeavor.[12]

But by itself, the emptiness of all things might lead one to feel that all differences are somehow equivalent precisely by being empty. That is, the relevance of all things may be seen as a generic, universally attributed quality which encourages us to say that nothing is of particular value since all differences have been either rendered unimportant or entirely obliterated. To borrow a phrase used in description of Hegel's logic of the identity of opposites, such an understanding of and attachment to emptiness results in "a night in which all cows are black." Emptiness perversely comes to mean that nothing matters in both the sense of "there is no matter, no ontic foundation for the play of experience" and "there is nothing which is of any value." Instead of expressing the bodhisattva life, practicing emptiness becomes a justification for a spiritual hedonism of the sort the Beat Generation was (rightly or wrongly) accused of purveying, and of which Nagarjuna was himself keenly aware (see MK 13.8). At the very core of this attachment is an egoistic retreat from fully responsive engagement with the world--a pernicious

misunderstanding of the teaching of no-self which allows one to feel free because all things are dependently arisen and because ultimately there is no one to own responsibility for what happens. Emptiness becomes a justification for withdrawing from the demands of sociality. As the logic of attachment to emptiness would have it, if Hui-neng is right and there is originally "no 'dust'", there is also nothing we need to do.

It should be clear that the Yogacara affirmation of mind serves to true or correct this errant understanding of emptiness. Whereas it is possible--based on the Mahdyamika claims that there is neither self-production nor other-production--to assert that no one bears responsibility for what comes to be, when all things are said to be projections of mind-only it necessarily follows that there is, after all, a source or focus of responsibility. Thus, in the <u>Lankavatara</u> <u>Sutra</u> there appears what is apparently an anomolous denial of the theory of no-self (Sagatham 765ff) and an affirmation of an ego-soul--what in later Ch'an came to be known as one's "true self", Huang-po's "one-mind."

Now, in order to avoid this true self being substantialized as a personal ego, the Yogacara appeals to the *ālayavijñāna* as the bearer of responsibility and the *manovijñāna*--the maker of discriminations based on *vāsanā* (habit-energy, Ch: *hsi-ch'i*[B])--as the source thereof (LS II.53). Thus, one is not individually responsible for the entire world in a megalomaniacal sense, nor is it merely that one is responsible in the manner of a purely subjective, epistemic solipsism. Especially in the Lankavatara, the tension created here between individually and universally-owned responsibility is played out quite effectively. At times, it seems that idealism is being asserted ontologically--the mind creates the world, and at other times epistemically--the mind creates by making distinctions in what precedes thinking.

In either case, however, responsibility is not allowed to be diluted in the Madhyamika solution of dependent origination or emptiness. The Yogacara steadfastly

maintains that enlightenment is not a matter of mere insight into the way things have come to be, but rather entails our ceasing to act on the basis of habit-energy. In the end, this is one's own responsibility--no Buddha or bodhisattva can dissolve the habits of perception, cognition, speech or action of even a single sentient being. Nor will they disappear by themselves. But, because habit-energy has been plaguing us over the entire course of beginningless time, the question naturally arises of how long it will take to clear the obscurations away, to purify the *ālaya*.

As the exchange of Hui-neng and Shen-hsiu evidences, this question focuses a deep and extensive problematic in Yogacara. If it takes time to clear the storehouse consciousness as Shen-hsiu implies, then enlightenment is a goal, an object, and under the perspicacious gaze of *prajñāpāramitā*, this objectivity is seen as a sign of nothing short of the forfeiture of enlightenment. Indeed, precisely as long as we see nirvana as something to be attained, just so long will it remain unattainable. Hence the Heart Sutra's declaration that there is no 'suffering', no 'origination', no 'stopping' and no 'path', no 'attainment' and no 'thing to attain'. The gradual path to enlightenment implied by the Yogacara is, however, not countered by Ch'an only with a head-on rejection of the self-nature of habits themselves along Madhyamika lines, but also by recognizing that time is no more an objective barrier to liberation than any other dharma. For Ch'an, enlightenment is not something which can be blocked--whether by so many moments of time or by so many fixed habits of thought, speech or deed--but only resisted. The key is not constant effort (*hsi*), but readiness (*tun*).

These sorts of mutual corrections between the three forms of relinquishing could be amplified at some length, but what has been noted thus far would seem to provide warrant enough to regard Huang-po's hierarchic terminology as nothing more than a rhetorical device intended to correct the thinking and conduct of a particular audience. In

fact, none of the three relinquishings can stand alone, but instead depend on one another in much the same way that the five *skandhas* (aggregates) exist only in relationship with one another and never independently. To use the analogy often employed in explaining the interdependence of these five constituents of each human being, practice is like a bundle of reeds which will topple over unless each form of relinquishing leans against all the others. In the absence of this support, none of them can stand--cultivated by itself, each form of relinquishing leads in one subtle way or another to the revitalization of the ego.

Thus, the transition from the lower to the middle to the great relinquishing represents neither a kind of horizontal doctrinal shift equivalent to the transition from, say, Neo-Platonism (mind-only) to Positivist Materialism (no-mind), nor the step by step articulation of a progressively refined method and theory of liberation. The "gateless gate" of Ch'an practice appears only when we relinquish our horizons on all three dimensions--readiness, responsibility and relevance--and so does not depend on any particular form of relinquishing being the first or last. Moreover, since Ch'an consists entirely of relinquishing horizons, and since the experienced world is a function of our individual and cultural projections of such limits, we are always capable of beginning. There is no need to traipse off in search of any particular 'this' or 'that', nor any need to worry about which step comes first and which second. We must simply begin, and "all by itself there is no place that is not the place of enlightenment." (T 2012.380c)

One of the advantages of seeing the practice of Ch'an as a self-correcting system arising out of the interplay of the three forms of relinquishing is that it enables us to shed valuable light on the claims made earlier in this chapter that practice is not something any one of 'us' can do, that it in fact can appear only when 'we' loosen our control over experience. To begin with, it would seem that we **do** have a role in initiating the process

by means of which practice is realized. It is, after all, 'you' and 'i' who must be willing to divest our 'selves' of their horizons and allow our narration to proceed unchecked. Unless 'we' decide to cultivate wider and more open horizons, our current strategies for grasping and rejecting will not only continue operating but will strengthen with each passing experience. That is, once an ego has developed, it will quite naturally and effectively maintain itself in the face of all but the most severe crises.[13] If liberation is to be won, 'we' must be willing to sacrifice our 'selves'.

It is for this reason that Pai-chang, having just announced that the principle of liberation is "letting things come and not selecting anything," (HTC 119.425a) then insists that no one, not even the Buddha himself, can save us. "Sentient beings must liberate (*tu*) themselves." Although we have to exert ourselves if we are to realize liberation, this exertion is simply not-acting (*wu-wei*) on the basis of our likes and dislikes. In short, if a buddha-land is to appear right where we stand, 'we' must get out of the way.

One way of conceptualizing this process is to see each of our 'selves' as a system of baffles (distinctions) which either block or deflect the free circulation of energy in a consistent manner--feeding some physical, emotional and conceptual sub-systems and starving others as seems appropriate for the maintenance and survival of the pattern as a whole. While some of these baffles serve to hold or funnel energy into the pattern as a whole (e.g., what Ch'an refers to as "attachments"), others (our "aversions") divert potentially disruptive kinds and amounts of energy away from 'us'. With the passage of time, a sediment of memories is deposited about the baffles which have proved successful and it is these that form the stable basis of our identities. Thus, the ego or 'mind' which generates these baffles through acting *yu-wei* is like a heart (*hsin*) which can exist only as long as there is a balance between its diastolic (attachment) and systolic (aversion)

functions. If either of these functions fails, the heart-mind eventually disintegrates--our identity dissolves.

Thus, while it is entirely true that the practice of Ch'an has nothing to do with cultivating this or that quality or this or that store of merit and ultimately entails the dissolution of both the 'one' who acts and 'that' on and for which they exert themselves--a dissolution, that is, of the pattern of *neng-suo*--it is 'we' who must initially desist from all seeking.[14] This apparent paradox can be effectively resolved precisely by seeing practice as a self-correcting system that emerges out of the dynamic interplay of the three forms of relinquishing. While each form has its own method and aim and can legitimately be talked about in terms of (for example) our cultivating ever more inclusive horizons, practice itself embraces and yet transcends the set of all these means and ends in much the same way that water is something other than a simple collection of hydrogen and oxygen atoms or a living organism something other than an aggregation of various kinds of organic molecules. Even though a living organism is never present when such molecules are entirely absent, a man or woman cannot be reduced to a particular pattern of organic molecules without the loss of at least some of the properties unique to being human. Likewise, as a self-organizing and self-maintaining system, practice never occurs when there is no relinquishing of horizons to readiness, responsibility and relevance, but it cannot be reduced to them without losing what is unique about a bodhisattva's way of life. 'You' and 'i' may initiate the process out of which the practice of Ch'an emerges, but once practice begins in earnest and not merely as an idea 'we' are entertaining, it has in a very real sense a life of its own. To appeal once again to an analogy to biological systems, practice embraces and yet transcends our efforts to relinquish horizons along the dimensions of readiness, responsibility and relevance just as the human body includes and yet cannot be reduced to a summation of the forms and intentions (and hence karma)

of the once-independent cells symbiotically bound up in its psycho-physical organization. A bodhisattva or buddha is not a sentient being in much the same way that a living human body is not a mere collection of cells. Something radically novel appears when the constituent cells are in proper relationship--what we refer to as "a human being." Likewise for a bodhisattva who is not any one sentient being or even a collection of any number of them since the self-other dichotomy has been entirely relinquished. A bodhisattva is a person, an entire world, who emerges as the narrative interplay of a potentialy unlimited number of individual characters or 'selves'. That is, a bodhisattva is pure conduct.

The practice of Ch'an is not systematic, then, in the sense of an orderly or logical procedure which 'you' and 'i' can carry out to bring about the goal of enlightenment. Instead, it is best seen as a higher order phenomenon which emerges with the organized interplay of the three forms of relinquishing and yet is itself formless. In much the same way that any self-organizing system is a novel pattern of relationships which--while emerging through the integration of previously existing patterns--nevertheless manifests entirely novel properties, practice marks the realization of unprecedented narrative possibilities. In short, it should be seen as the realization of conduct that is truly *wu-wei.*

Thus, while 'you' and 'i' cannot practice individually, each of us can and has for at least the span of this lifetime been resisting its manifestation by positing order as standing over and against the unexpected, imagining that this is the best way to lead happy and fruitful lives--both private and public.[15] We refuse to trust ourselves enough to let go of our tenuous control of experience and allow our narration to open up in unchecked improvisation.

As a system, the practice of Ch'an takes place at a higher level of organization than the ego and yet unless the ego is willing to relinquish the control it has wrested in

self-preservation--from the hands of 'others', from 'society', from 'brute nature'--enlightenment remains nothing more than a dream, a pleasant fantasy. What emerges with practice has, from 'our' perspective, no form, no beginning, no end. It is not something we can comprehend. We may refer to it as Hui-neng's "original nature", as Ma-tsu's "everyday mind", as Huang-po's "one-mind", or as Lin-chi's "true man of no rank", but in actuality we can never succeed in objectifying it since it has no substance, no abiding nature. What emerges with practice is just spontaneously buddhist conduct--narrative movement which embodies unlimited social virtuosity in the realization of a horizonless and liberating intimacy. It is for this reason that Hui-neng remarks that "it is precisely buddhist practice that is the Buddha." (PS 42) Having no 'self', no attachments, no aversions, there is nothing to stand between us and the Buddha. Enlightenment is not something received or attained, but an offering of centerless and unalloyed responsiveness through the realization of who we truly are as persons--an authorless narration into which all things are being constantly taken up and completed.

CHAPTER 9

THE TECHNIQUES OF UNMAKING: ENERGY AND AWAKENING IN CH'AN

Seen as the embodiment of horizonless intimacy, the practice of Ch'an may be spoken of as the true meaning of sociality. With the systematic realization of the three forms of relinquishing, our narrative opens up as the spontaneous emergence of a pure and centerless buddha-land in which neither identity nor difference has any ultimate foundation and hence in which habit and prediction find no abiding purchase. 'Sentient beings' and 'buddhas', 'commoners' and 'sages' all disappear, leaving behind only the fluid and wondrous functioning (*miao yung*) of one-mind. Practice is not, therefore, a way of **becoming** a 'buddha'--a present means to a future and superior end, but should simply be seen as the virtuosic expression of our true and original nature (*cheng-pen-hsing*)--as unhesitatingly conducting ourselves **as** buddhas.

Strictly speaking, then, there is nothing we need in order to practice Ch'an, and yet the public records (*kung-an*) of the tradition are filled with instances of students being rejected out of hand, asked to go back to whereever they had come from, even kicked repeatedly down the steps of the monastery. If Ch'an practice really arises as an unprecedented level of narrative integration and flexibility out of the system of the three relinquishings, these refusals would appear to be inexplicable. After all, if "everyone's entire body is the Buddha," (T 2012.383a) on what grounds could anyone be considered unworthy or incapable of entering the gate of Ch'an? If Hui-neng is right and there is no dust to obscure the mirror of our original nature, what could possibly impede us?

Since we attain nothing in conducting ourselves as buddhas, but simply express our true nature as boundless and responsive offering, all that should be necessary to enter

the practice of Ch'an is our willingness to wholeheartedly engage in lively and unrestricted concourse with others. Like all forms of conduct, enlightenment is not something any 'one' of us can do, but must be seen as a spontaneous transformation of our narration in which each of us creatively participates to the exact extent that we relax the 'self'-protecting and 'self'-serving boundaries (*ching*) established by our opinions and views. And so the difference between wanting to **become** a buddha and conducting ourselves **as** one finally pivots on 'your' and 'my' ability to let go--to divest our 'selves' of their hard-won control over experience so that our narrative may naturally (*tzu-jan*) orient itself away from that societal disintegration which spawns ostensibly self-contained and other-regulating egos, and to move instead toward the realization of true community.

But, conceding that this is true--that relinquishing our 'self'-control is the first and most crucial step in alleviating suffering--is not the same as actually letting go. Indeed, while the readiness to disenfranchise our 'selves' is unconditioned in the sense that it cannot be forced or inhibited by others, the karmic or intentional structure of the 'self' acts as a kind of labyrinth through which this readiness must pass before coming to fruition. In most cases, it simply gets lost along the way, its meaning truncated, and we find ourselves seeking this or that experience as confirmation or proof of our progress in becoming 'self'-less.

This is as much as to say that depending on the density of the distinctions or evaluations which channel and inevitably retard the free circulation of energy throughout our narrative, true practice may remain nothing more than an ideal or potential. Hence Hui-neng's admission that manifesting our readiness to awaken is not simply a function of our decision to open ourselves to liberation, but of whether we have keen or dull roots (*ken*). While not even a hair's breadth separates samsara and nirvana, unless the pattern of discriminations out of which our 'selves' emerge can be extirpated, their disparity may not

be able to be bridged even by stringing together worlds as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.[1]

In fact, every student of Ch'an must eventually discover that they lack the wherewithal to make good on their intent to abandon their 'selves' precisely because this intention provides a failsafe anchor for the very 'self' it aims at relinquishing. In other words, if the buddhist road to hell is paved with our good intentions, it is not because they or even we were ultimately insincere or misguided, but because they perform the same karmic function as any other intentions--our continued fixation as 'selves'. It turns out that the hardest thing is not accomplishing great deeds or even having profoundly mystical experiences, but not seeking, making or getting anything at all.[2] The real problem, then, is that the intent to practice or attain enlightenment--to relinquish all of our horizons for readiness, responsibility and relevance--is the very thing which makes this impossible. The apparent paradox and indeed the great irony is that 'you' and 'i' must decide to forfeit all hope of enlightenment for enlightenment to occur. At least for the Ch'an tradition, this is the true meaning of the bodhisattva vow.

The single most important question we can ask of Ch'an, then, is not "how are we to practice?" since 'we' never will, but "how can our 'selves' be sufficiently attenuated for the unprecedented conduct characteristic of the bodhisattva life to appear?" That is, even as we form the intention to relinquish our horizons to readiness, responsibility and relevance, we must ask what techniques can be used to dismantle ourselves as intentional beings, as repositories of the eighty-four thousand kinds of discrimination. Failing to do so, the path of enlightened concourse will remain obstructed, our narration characterized by selfishly unresolved conflicts and dishonored commitments.

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As a preliminary to articulating Ch'an's approach to the attentuation of 'self', it is useful to note that in the writings and recorded talks of the lineage running from Hui-neng through Ma-tsu to Lin-chi, there is no suggestion that this dismantling is understood as a piecemeal affair. To the contrary, since no exceptions are granted to Pai-chang's principle of not selecting anything, Ch'an would appear to insist that we avoid taking on the task of choosing which distinctions to eliminate with the same unremitting vigilance we maintain in not grasping after or rejecting any particular sensations, thoughts or situations. This being the case, relinquishing our distinctions--especially that between 'self' and 'other'--cannot amount to a logical procedure of identifying some conceptual, perceptual or emotive opposition and then "turning our back on" or negating it. Such a *via negativa* may appeal to our calculative dispositions and their fascination with rationality, but it will never do more than to produce an infinitely regressing series of meta-distinctions--'self' giving way to 'not-self' which gives way to 'neither ['self' nor 'not-self']', which in turn leads to 'not {'neither ['self' nor 'not-self']'}', and so on. As Yung-chia's elaborate dialectics was intended to show (see T vol.48.2013), such a strategy for achieving no-'self' is finally 'self'-promoting to the precise degree that it gives 'us' something to do or make (*tso*).

To repeat, we cannot free ourselves from all discrimination by fiat. Since discrimination is the very basis on which we are able to act *yu-wei*, purposely entering the gate of Ch'an would amount to nothing short of pulling our 'selves' up by 'our own' bootstraps. An essentially arrogant project, not only will the most herculean effort fail to lift us over the threshold, our persistence will effectively forestall if not entirely block the opportunity for 'others' to cross over.

Two important implications follow from this. First, relinquishing our 'selves' in order to realize the practice of Ch'an must be accomplished indirectly. That is, such a

relinquishing cannot be a simple putting away or cutting off of what we have identified as our 'selves' since these acts of discrimination constitute subtle forms of seeking that cannot but reinforce the existence of a 'seeker'--usually one fatally attracted to 'emptiness' and sustained in direct proportion to the depth and extent of its negative projections. Secondly, if this relinquishing is not ultimately something that any 'one' of us can do alone or that will happen all by itself--the system of distinctions we know as our 'selves' usually being quite competently self-maintaining--it would appear that successfully abating the 'self' means having a partner, a counterpart with whom we can enter into lively and mutually 'self'-effacing concourse.[3] In a very general sense, then, the realization of Ch'an practice would appear to pivot on making effective use of what we can refer to as the complementary methods or techniques of indirection and partnership.

A. Indirection: Meditative Discipline as Energy Work.

If the influence of the 'self' is to be sufficiently curbed for our narrative to unremittingly manifest the practice life, 'you' and 'i' must be deceived--convinced that 'we' are maintaining our central role as 'free agents' even as we are undermining the basis of our control. In a very literal sense, we must be tricked into enlightenment.

One of the seemingly odd facts about the Ch'an tradition is that while it ceaselessly espoused a doctrine of radical spontaneity and freedom from all forms of societal constraint and idealized the unhesitating, indefatigable virtuosity of a master musician or poet, the daily life of a Ch'an monastery was highly organized and formal. From what we can gather, each day included significant periods devoted to chanting sutras, sitting in meditation and performing the kinds of repetitive manual labor common in unmechanized, rural communities. In fact, from the available evidence it would appear that at least after Pai-chang's codification of a specifically Ch'an set of rules for the monastic life, monks and nuns in the T'ang were significantly less free to do as they

pleased than were their Indian forebears. For example, whereas the Indian monk or nun was forbidden to earn his or her keep and relied on begging for each day's sustenance, after Pai-chang it was taken as law that "a day without work is a day without eating."

In short, Ch'an seems to have promoted a kind of double life--a life concerned on the one hand with opening up in uninhibited and unrestricted improvisation, and on the other hand to cultivating a mundane regularity which varied only according to the climatic demands of the changing seasons. Thus, while all the masters of the tradition vigorously denied the dependence of Ch'an on any form of cultivation, each underwent and required his students to undergo extensive periods of meditative, moral and manual training.

This apparent inconsistency is, I believe, related to the need to fool the 'self' into relinquishing control of experience, of the perceived movement of our narrative. That is, Ch'an makes use of a regulative orientation of day-to-day life precisely as a means of undermining the societality of selfish conduct and preparing us for the transition to truly social life. In much the same way that fire is used to fight fire, Ch'an avails itself of the regularity of a societally oriented life in order to curb and bring about the atrophy of the very 'self' who enters into and promotes that life. Understanding how this indirection works and its relationship to meditative discipline will require us to explicate the basis of what has until now been an unqualified appeal to seeing the 'self' as a pattern of distinctions which characteristically and relatively constantly diverts the free circulation of energy or *ch'i*[B].

1. Ch'i, *Narrative Movement, and the Restraints of 'Self'.*

In both the Taoist and later Confucian traditions, the notion of *ch'i*[B] provides a linkage between the quality of human life and that of the rest of the cosmos. Carrying connotations which we would associate with "blood," "breath," "vital force," and

"spiritedness," *ch'i*^{B} primarily designates the dynamic in world process, its inherent and unlimited vitality as opposed to its organization or form (*hsiang*).

Thus, Chuang-tzu states that "human life is a coming together of energy (*ch'i*^{B})," and that understanding this energy is the key to sagely conduct. By characterizing the Taoist sage as someone who "makes absolutely sure that things can do what they are supposed to do," (tr. Watson, 1968:93) who "follows along with things they way they are..." (ibid., p.94) and "supplies all their wants out of total emptiness," (ibid., p.128) Chuang-tzu makes it clear that understanding energy leads to or at least allows us to do what Ch'an later formulates as "according with the situation and responding as needed." This principle holds true for Chuang-tzu because:

> The ten thousand things are really one. We look on some as beautiful because they are rare or unearthly; we look on others as ugly because they are foul and rotten. But the foul and rotten may turn into the rare and unearthly, and the rare and unearthly may turn into the foul and rotten. So it is said, You have only to comprehend the one breath (*ch'i*^{B}) that is the world. The sage never ceases to value oneness. (tr.Watson, 1968:235-6)

In short, Chuang-tzu sees all opposites as nothing other than momentary articulations of what is essentially a single movement. Like our own breath, the vitality of *ch'i*^{B} is circulatory, and so while it may appear to us here as rising or good (*yang*) and there falling or evil (*yin*), in actuality the natural movement of *ch'i*^{B} is always full and round. Differences are never absolute, then, but must be seen as a joint function of the spontaneous circulation of *ch'i*^{B} and our orientation or perspective on it. For this reason, while the apparent polarity of the movement that is *ch'i*^{B} is held to be responsible for the articulation of the ten thousand things, it is also seen as their unification or harmony. Hence, Lao-tzu not only remarks that "the myriad things carry yin and embrace yang"--that is, maintain differences--but that "the interfusion of [their] *ch'i*^{B} is harmony." (LT 42)

In the sky, *ch'i*[B] manifests as the orbitting of the planets and stars and the quality of their light, as the rising and falling of mists and clouds, the play of emotion witnessed in the shifting directions and intensities of the wind. In the forest, it appears as the movements and characters of the deer and the tiger, as the personalities of the fir and the willow, as the spirit of a waterfall spreading the muscular, granite thighs of a sun-washed mountainside. In human beings, it is not only the circulation of the blood and the rhythm of breathing in and out, but the determinant of the roots of their character--what makes one man a passionate musician and another a coldly vicious warrior.

In short, *ch'i*[B] is not a kind of primordial matter or bare force--something that can be comprehended in a purely quantitative or factual terms--but must be seen as an essentially qualitative expressiveness. A large part of the difficulty in understanding the Chinese arts and sciences--medicine and geomancy in particular--is that they do not take 'being' (or even 'beings') and 'absolute measurement' as the basic categories from which everything else is to be deduced. That is, they do not take change or motion to be a definite and calculable alteration of some (ostensibly unchanging) thing with respect to a fixed frame of spatial or temporal reference. Instead, the Chinese have traditionally seen as basic a complex and open-ended system of irreducibly relative or contrapuntal values. While these values are usually spoken of as permutations of *yin* and *yang*, they do not constitute a set of opposing Manichean principles out of which all things are formed, but an unbroken continuum onto which we project divisions for purely conventional purposes. The structure of the world of Chinese thought is not digital, but analogic; not calculative, but narrative.

Contrary, then, to the Indo-european tradition where some permanent order or source of order has almost always been assumed to underlie and unify the transformations constantly taking place in the world of experience, the Chinese have traditionally seen the

unity of all things as a function or expression of change itself--the indeterminateness of ungrounded vitality. The harmony of all things is not provided for by substance, form, a divine being or even the laws of 'nature', but changeability.

Nowhere is this more profoundly illustrated than in the *I Ching* where the world is said to be engendered when Great Ultimate (*t'ai-chi*[D]) gives birth to the two exemplars (*yin* and *yang*) which in turn generate the four models which then generate the eight trigrams. The eight trigrams--or more properly, the configurations of changeability which they symbolize--determine good fortune and misfortune, and these in turn "create the great field of action." (IC Great Appendix II, 11.5-6) Far from seeing the Great Ultimate as a kind of Aristotelean "unmoved mover," the Chinese identification of *yin* and *yang* as modes or aspects of *ch'i* makes it clear that the latter is finally indistinguishable from the *t'ai-chi*[D] out of which all things emerge. *Ch'i*[B] is not only embodied **as** the ten thousand things, it is the unbridled vitality flowing through and enlivening them.

Significantly, the eight trigrams not only map out the cardinal points of the natural world--heaven, earth, thunder, wind/wood, fire, water, lake/mist, and mountain--they symbolize parts of the body, organic functions, psychological qualities, emotions and mental functions, parts of the life cycle, family relationships, principles of nature, and positions in time and space.[4] Combined in the sixty-four hexagrams, they are said to exhaustively describe the dynamic order of the cosmos. Thus, the quality of any situation--whether it be auspicious or baleful, progressive or regressive, pleasurable or painful--is inseparable from the transformation and movement of *ch'i*[B]. At bottom, every success and failure, all joy or suffering are a function of how well the various *ch'i*[B] in the situation circulate, blend and complement one another.

And so, whereas the traditionally-trained European medical doctor starts with a symptom and looks for an underlying mechanism--a pinpointable cause for disease in

some dietary deficiency, organic malfunction, or invading virus, the Chinese doctor attends to the patient's entire bodily, psychic and social situation until he or she discerns a pattern of energic disharmony. Rather than the so-called "fixed" organs, skeletal structure, or viruses present, what is most important in both diagnosis and treatment are the fluids and energies flowing both in the patient's body and out of it into his or her environment, family and friends. Therapy does not consist primarily of manipulating organic structures, but of bringing the whole energy configuration back into balance--restoring the harmonious blending of the various *ch'i*[B] which constitute a living human being. Whether this is done by stimulating various of the energy conduits or meridians in the body with acupuncture, prescribing herbal concoctions, or revitalizing a moribund family relationship through the timely performance of some ritual or *li* is not particularly relevant. What every method aims at is either removing a blockage--opening up the patient as a whole person so that *ch'i*[B] can flow through them freely and spontaneously, or adding one or another quality of *ch'i*[B] to the patient's system in order to redress a debilitating imbalance. For the Chinese, 'health' and 'disease', 'pleasure' and 'pain', 'joy' and 'suffering' are functions of the balance and imbalance of *ch'i*[B].

But since all the modalities of worldly existence are a function of various balances and interfusions of *ch'i*, each of our lives is part of the continual circulation of the blood and breath constituting the cosmic process. Given that all things are thus organically related, if we are out of balance--that is, if our energy is not well-blended or is blocked from flowing in natural accord with our *tao*--not only will we suffer as individuals, all things will be adversely affected.

Balancing someone's *ch'i*[B] is not, therefore, a simple matter of treating their body, but necessarily involves opening all of their relationships to the free circulation of energy.

In short, it is a matter of harmonizing their entire narrative. Thus, the *Kuan-tzu* (circa 300B.C.) indicates that:

> When the quintessential is present and of itself vitalises, the outside of you flourishes. Stored within as the fount and source, flood-like it harmonises and calms. It constitutes the depths of the *ch'i*[B]. If the depths do not dry up, the four limbs are firm. If the fount is not drained, the nine orifices allow clear passage. Then one is able to exhaust heaven and earth, and spread over the four seas. (KT 2/102, tr Rickett, 1965:163, H)

The particular relevance of this to the Ch'an project of realising the bodhisattva life is made clear in the "Inward Training" chapter of the *Kuan-tzu*. There, the presence of this world-balancing flow of energy is said to be possible only when we are free of restlessness, when the "heart/mind is fixed within" and the senses clear and distinct. Once a stable heart or mind arises, every part of the body is filled with the straightforward and complete "energy of the mind." This energy cannot remain within, however, but takes shape and appears on the outside:

> It can be known from the complexion of the face. When people meet someone whose appearance and mind are full of positive energy, they will feel happier than if they had met their own brother. On the other hand, when people meet someone with negative energy, they will feel more hurt than if they had been confronted with arms. (KT 13.5b, quoted in Hidemi, 1989:57)

Since the basic structure of our personality depends on the configuration and quality of our energy, and since our personality directly affects others and their responses to us, reconfiguring our energy is the key to transforming our lives.

In full agreement with this understanding of the relationship between the quality of our energy and the responses of others, Huang-po tells us that we should not try "to control other people," but that we should "see things as reflecting [our own] demeanor (*mien*)." (T 2012.382c) Failing this, we are no better than "idiotic dogs" barking at the wind blowing through the grass and trees because they seem to be attacking or

challenging us. Ultimately, it is our own energy--our habits (*ch'i*[B] *hsi*) or demeanor (*ch'i*[B] *hsiang*[A])--which directs and restrains the movements of the people and things confronting and often countering us.[5] As Hui-neng is said to have answered when he overheard a group of monks arguing about whether it is the flag that moves or the wind--"You are all wrong. It is your mind (your present configuration of energy) that is moving." (Hoover 1980:64)

What this implies, of course, is that the quality of our entire narration and hence the meaning of our conduct can be transformed indirectly. Although the 'self' typically considers experience to prove otherwise, a positive and lasting course of personal development does not necessarily depend on our acting *yu-wei*, on the purposeful application of our wills. To the contrary, simply by balancing our own *ch'i*[B] and opening up to its free circulation through us, not only our own lives but the lives of those around us are naturally (*tzu jan*) ameliorated.

Thus, Chuang-tzu informs us that there are times when a true sage--someone who understands the one *ch'i*[B]--can:

> without saying a word, induce harmony in others; just standing alongside others, he can cause them to change until the proper relationship between father and son has found its way into every home. He does it all in a spirit of unity and effortlessness--so far is he removed from the [customary] minds of men. (tr. Watson 1968:281)

Importantly, the key to the sage's influence is his effortlessness and ability to divorce himself from the customary minds of men--that is, from their habitual dispositions, the typical structure of their precedents for action. In a word, the key is conduct that is *wu-wei*--the realization of true spontaneity (*tzu-jan*) which is at once true unity.[6]

In a passage the spirit of which is later and enthusiastically taken up into the corpus of Ch'an, Chuang-tzu supplies a crucial clue as to how this spontaneity comes

about through what the *Kuan-tzu* referred to as stilling or fixing (*ting*) of the heart. In the context of arguing that a man can be without what is essential to 'man', he says that:

> judging "it's this, it's not" is what I mean by the essential to man. What I mean by being without the essential is that the man does not inwardly wound his person by likes and dislikes, that he constantly goes by the spontaneous and does not add anything to the process of life. (tr. Graham 1989:195-6; cp. Watson 1968:75-76)

Uncannily reminiscent of the Buddha's claim that 'is' and 'is-not' are the barbs on which mankind is impaled, Chuang-tzu identifies the source of our discomfort and our loss of spontaneity as the formation of distinctions leading to likes and dislikes--in short, to our immersion in seeking.

Holding distinctions wounds us by biasing our body-mind system in such a way that *ch'i*[B] is blocked from circulating freely. Whether this wound comes from rejecting or from attaching to some quality of change or some object of intellectual or sensual desire does not matter. Regardless of their 'impeccability', our intentions divert or stem the natural flow of energy by means of which all things are nourished. Our intentions--and in the end our 'selves'--can be played out only at the expense of others. As soon as we take a stand on our likes and dislikes, we lose our natural ability to respond spontaneously and develop instead a relatively unchanging complex of stock reactions--a familiar habitus of feelings and desires. In a word, we engender our 'selves'.

As what is "essential (*ching*[A]) to 'man'," this complex of stock distinctions is what identifies us as particular individuals.[7] But in establishing the central perspective from which we perceive the world 'around' us and on the ground of which we decide how and when to act, it is also what curbs and directs the movement of our narration--the quality and orientation of our conduct. And so, in a reversal of the usual roles granted to the world and the 'self', the Taoist and the Ch'an Buddhist agree that ultimately it is never things which restrain the 'self', but the 'self' which--as at least Chuang-tzu makes clear--

controls or restrains all 'things' through systematically perverting the free circulation of *ch'i*^{B}. In fact, as A.C. Graham puts it, "In renouncing control of the *ch'i*^{B} selfhood dissolves; yet paradoxically in ceasing to distinguish myself from what all the time has been acting through me, I become for the first time the true agent of my actions" (1989:198)--what we have been referring to as a person or that which 'precedes' the splintering of 'subject' and 'object', 'self' and 'other'. With the dissolution of the 'self', our conduct opens up in an unprecedented effortlessness and our narration--that is our entire world--regains its creative and unmitigatedly apt spontaneity.

2. *Sitting Ch'an as the Atrophy of 'Self'*.

As long as we are involved in seeking, we inhibit spontaneity. Searching for 'this', we neglect 'that'. Selecting one path or one aim, all others are cut off. When matters are like this, we so impose on the world that nothing can move unimpeded in a natural expression of its *tao*. Since for the Chinese, all things are specific configurations of *ch'i*^{B} or vital energy, imposing an order on the world--on our narrative--is seen as blocking or diverting the free flow of energy in the great harmony (*ta ho*) which naturally obtains when nothing interrupts its "self-soing" (*tzu-jan*). Spontaneity cannot, therefore, be directly cultivated. We cannot **make** ourselves or anything else act without precedent (*wu-wei*). To the contrary--and unlike the farmer who pulled up all of his rice plants trying to help them grow--'we' must refrain from doing or making anything.[8]

In pre-Buddhist China, it was already well-established that learning how to let things grow by themselves was something indirectly accomplished by balancing our *ch'i*^{B} through a regimen of concentrated breathing and sitting which were said to have the effect of "fasting the heart/mind". The locus classicus for this is a passage in the *Chuang-tzu* where Yen Hui is criticized by Confucius for still taking his 'mind' as his teacher. Yen Hui is nonplussed and asks what else he can do, to which Confucius replies, "You must

fast!" Unlike bodily fasting before a sacrifice, fasting the mind involves "unifying our attention" and refraining from listening with either the ears or the 'mind'. Instead, we must listen with our *ch'i*[B]. "Listening [usually] stops at the ears, the 'mind' at what tallies with it, but *ch'i* is empty and waits on all things. The Tao gathers in emptiness. Emptying is the fasting of the heart." (tr. Watson 1968:58-9)

Listening with our *ch'i*[B] is attending to where energy is already and naturally flowing, not to where our limited senses and our distinctions orient us. Especially when we listen with our 'minds' we hear only what is pre-determined, only what falls within the particular horizons for relevance we're presently projecting. Only because these horizons exist is it possible to speak of the tally being met, our expectations fulfilled. On the other hand, *ch'i*[B] is said to be empty precisely because it has no preferences, no fixed biases. Without these and the horizons on which they depend, there is no possibility of ever being filled--no likelihood of ever coming to an 'end', a point at which things have gone far enough.

Ch'i[B] "waits on all things" because it has nowhere it is trying to go, nothing it is trying to avoid. Without aim or identity, *ch'i*[B] moves without being moved and acts without acting. In this sense, it exemplifies conduct that is *wu-wei*--narrative movement that happens all by itself, unauthored and unrestricted. Thus in the fifth century Taoist text, the *Hsi-sheng Ching*, it is not only said that "when energy departs, the living die; [and that] with its increase and decrease, there appears radiance or disease," (HSC 11.5-6) but that "if the five elements did not overcome each other"--if their natural flow were not blocked or imbalanced--"then the myriad things could all be complete." (HSC 11.9) How is this radiant harmony brought about? "Constantly empty, doing nothing, being aware and serene and cultivating your bodily form: thus the myriad things are nurtured." (HSC 25.2)

Fasting the heart should be seen, then, as a means of bringing about the uniquely balanced energy conditions within which it is possible for us to conduct ourselves as if we had no preferences, no aims and no identity. In short, it is starving our 'minds'--the central constellations around which pivot the greater dispositional networks we identify as our 'selves'. By refusing to nourish the distinctions out of which 'mind' has emerged, we effectively attenuate the 'self' and release the energy hitherto bound up in its structure for the benefit of all things.

Importantly, this fasting cannot be a matter of simply refraining from conscious decision making and allowing our attention to wander whereever it is inclined to go. As long as the multi-dimensional complex of distinctions on which our 'selves' depend still exists intact, not focusing on anything in particular is not a way of attenuating the 'self', but a licensc for it to run riot. It is for this reason that the minds of beginning meditators are compared to monkeys chattering and swinging through a jungle canopy. Left unattended, the 'mind' simply follows the momentary and apparently randomly ordered whims of its dispositions. Whether these dispositions govern the movement of our narrative and hence of our experience because they are 'chosen' or not is irrelevant: the 'accidental' play of our distinctions is no less 'selfish' than when we feel we are consciously making use of them. In Buddhist terms, it is to be used by our karma rather than using it (by conducting ourselves as bodhisattvas).

In recognition of precisely this problem, when Pai-chang is asked what the method of *wu-wei* is, he replies, "*yu-wei*". Then, after dismissing the *yu-wu* dichotomy as just another dependent opposition, he says that:

> If you're actually talking about true *wu-wei*, it's not taking hold of either '*yu-wei*' or '*wu-wei*'. Why is that? The scriptures say, "If you hold onto the characters of things, then you are attached to 'self'. If you hold onto there being no characteristics of things, then you're [still] attached to 'self'". For this reason, you

> shouldn't hold onto 'dharmas' ('things') and you also shouldn't hold onto 'adharma' (not-'things'). (HTC 119.324b)

That is, it is only in an abstract sense that 'we' can eschew purposeful activity. Whether we take precedents (*yu*) or no-precedents (*wu*) as the basis of our orientation, 'we' are still acting purposefully, still setting the parameters by means of which our narrative is directed.

It is thus not the periphery of experience--the so-called "object pole" of 'dharma' and 'adharma'--that really matters if we are to liberate the energy bound up in the intentional structure of the 'self', but the status of that center itself. True *wu-wei* arises only when the center itself ceases to hold. But as Pai-chang makes clear, since both 'holding on' and 'holding off' are unavoidably 'selfish', there is in fact no alternative to taking *yu-wei* as our method, no alternative to using the 'self' to undermine itself. In an apparent paradox, fasting the mind--and hence balancing our *ch'i*[B]--cannot be carried out by distraction, but only through concentration.

In what is perhaps the earliest description of Taoist meditation techniques, the *T'ai-p'ing Ching* refers to the general method of concentration as *shou-i* or "guarding the one"--a term later taken up in Chinese Buddhism to cover the range of meanings usually assigned to *dhyana, samadhi* or *smrti* (Chappell 1983:100). To bring about *shou-i*, one first had to prepare a meditation chamber, lock the doors, and make sure no one ever entered and disturbed the practice. Once inside the room:

> One should examine oneself. If one finds oneself not able to concentrate properly, one had better leave the room again. There is no way to enforce the practice. Only by gradually attaining concentration and by slowly maturing in the practice will one eventually attain peace...[then] one should be able to inspect oneself as if one saw one's reflection in clear water. Thereby the myriad affairs will begin to take care of themselves naturally. (tr. Kohn 1989:139)

Thought of as a "complete mental fixation on the inner light of the body as the visible manifestation of the cosmic forces of creation"--a fixation (*ting*) which was often

accomplished in the initial stages of one's training by focusing as exclusively as possible on either the breath or the inner organs or nexuses where *ch'i*^{B} was thought to collect (tr. Kohn 1989:137)--the attainment of *shou-i* was not important on account of it enabling us to **experience** a connection with universal energy or *ch'i*^{B}, but because it enables us to enter into such spontaneous accord with our situation that everything takes care of itself. In this sense, *shou-i* may be seen as the consummate, deliberate activity by means of which we cross the threshold from *yu* to *wu*--the concrete means of relinquishing our 'selfish' control over things so that while 'we' do nothing at all, nothing remains unattended.

That this association of concentration, the liberation of *ch'i*^{B}, and conduct that is truly *wu-wei* is not peculiar to the *T'ai-p'ing Ching* but represents a kind of orthodoxy in the Chinese understanding of meditative discipline is borne out in both the *Huai-nan-tzu* and the *Kuan-tzu*. For instance, it is unqualifiedly claimed that:

> When the mind can be concentrated on the inside of the body, it can pervade everything just as the One or Tao itself. As long as the mind stays unmoving (that is, undistracted), one will never know what one is doing, nor where one is going...one knows without studying, sees without looking, accomplishes things without doing anything. (HNT 7.5a, tr. Hidemi 1989:64)

That is, when the mind is so concentrated--whether on the breath, the inner organs, or on the entirety of our own natures--that nothing distracts us or catches our attention, the usual blockages to the free circulation of energy are effectively dissolved and conduct proceeds without precedent. This is nothing short of being "without what is essential to 'man'"--without our likes and dislikes, the preferences or barbs which not only divert or snag the energy flowing through our narration, but which create the conditions that necessitate our 'dealing with' a world which doesn't always 'go our way'. In a phrasing

that is less facetious than it sounds, when we go fishing for this or that experience, getting a "bite" almost always means fighting to remain centered and retain control.

Freeing ourselves from these hindrances--achieving unbiased awareness--is for the Chinese a means of allowing energy to freely expand and encompass all things. As the *Kuan-tzu* puts it, "When the mind opens up and energy expands, we speak of the [free] circulation of energy." (KT 16.5a, tr. Hidemi 1989:49) But since this free circulation is predicated on the absence of all distinctions--all obstructions to fully improvised or spontaneous narrative movement or conduct--opening the mind through concentration must be seen as a way of undermining the 'mind' on which 'self' depends. That is, realizing unbiased awareness through concentrative meditation is incompatible with the maintenance of a centralized 'self'. Hence the *Huai-nan-tzu's* claim that "when energy fills everything"--when we are completely open and offer no resistance to the free flow of energy--"the mind is also present everywhere." (HNT 1.16a, tr. Hidemi 1989:57). The possibility of locating the 'self' no longer obtains.

What we find, then, in the indigenous (that is, pre-Buddhist) Chinese meditation tradition is a view of concentrative meditation as doing energy-work aimed at dissolving the 'self' and opening up the possibility of conduct that is unprecedented and yet nourishing of all things.[9] That is, we are not instructed to perform a "deconstruction" by means of which we directly subvert our customary distinctions, but to simply maintain a constant focus on some aspect (or if our skill permits, of the entirety) of our ongoing experience. Doing so, energy expands both in the sense of radiating outward and accumulating or intensifying.

While this was popularly supposed to eventuate the possession of miraculous abilities in meditative adepts--generally speaking, the ability to defy "natural" law--in its most philosophically relevant formulation, it was seen as leading to the full realization of

our inner nature, a nature understood as profoundly connected or one with the cosmos as a whole. According to the *Hsin-hsu*:

> Inner nature is where the energy of the spirit assembles. When inner nature is completed, the energy of the spirit radiates with brilliance and shines out of the body. It then is able to perfectly respond to impulses it receives from other beings. (HH 8.11b)

In short, while concentrative meditation in the Chinese tradition has always been oriented toward the dissolution of the 'self', this was not equated with an absorption into a featureless or universal consciousness along the lines of Indian yoga, but seen as a practical method for attaining improvisational excellence--a virtuosic ability to respond to any contingency or demand.

While it is too much to say in the context of Chinese meditation that experience is irrelevant, the fact that meditation ideally develops us to a point where--while 'we' neither know what we are doing or where we are going--things are freed to take care of themselves strongly suggests that subjective experience was never taken as the **goal** of meditative discipline. That is, the Chinese meditator no more undertakes his or her discipline in order to have various experiences than a jazz musician plays the guitar in order to move his or her fingers in particularly intricate patterns. Experiences will no doubt occur, some of them quite extra-ordinary, but they are simply not the point. Whereas Indian yoga traditionally took all activity--be it meditative, intellectual or practical--as a means of gaining the ultimate fruit of an experienced unity with or non-differentiation from Brahman, the Chinese seem to have viewed experience as merely an unavoidable component in alleviating the restrictive bias of 'mind'--in cybernetic terminology, as a useful part of the feedback circuit by means of which our world is rendered less inharmonious.

Moreover, since the aim of Chinese meditation is enharmonization and not any particular quality of subjective experience as such, it also cannot be consistently maintained that the not-knowing which meditation is said to bring about amounts to the kind of absence of consciousness or experience which results with the Indian yogi's attainment of the state of non-perception. To the contrary, it is more like the musician's not knowing exactly what each finger is doing while improvising: finger movements are surely going on, but what matters is the music itself--something which he or she is at once articulating and taken up into or contained by. Indeed, as soon as a musician actively tries attending to where each finger is going and why--that is, as soon as I try to figure out "what 'i' am doing and where 'i' am headed"--the music suffers. Truly great improvisations occur only when 'we' stop trying to **make** music and simply allow it to play through us.

In summary, the fruit of Chinese meditative discipline is just the development of a narration, a life/world, in which *ch'i*^{B} is so balanced and unobstructed that all things--and here 'you' and 'i' must eventually be included among them--will take care of themselves quite independently of the vicissitudes of our subjective awareness. In narrative terms, the fruit of Chinese meditation is not a transcendence of the world, or the experience of ourselves as an eternal and unchanging soul (*ātman*), but realising who we are as uninterruptedly virtuosic **persons**. Thus, as Donald Munro points out, while the Chinese clearly found a use for terms which suggest aspects of human being which are of a psychic or spiritual nature--for example, *p'o* ("sentient soul"), *hun* ("spiritual soul") and *shen* ("spirit")--none of these were given a special metaphysical status (1969:50). Nor were they taken as needing or warranting either direct cultivation or a purifying disentanglement from physical and hence interpersonal form (*hsing*). Even in the later Taoist tradition where immortality became a goal of meditative discipline, this was not

conceived in spiritual or psychic, but rather bodily terms. For the Chinese, the status of the "soul" was never of paramount importance, but rather that of our relationships.

In this light, and as a prelude to turning our attention more completely toward Ch'an meditation, it is important to note that as iconoclastic a thinker and teacher as Ma-tsu not only claims that "all things are liberated" and that "the liberated is true Suchness"--that is, the spontaneously illuminating quality of buddha-nature or conduct that is *wu-wei*--but that:

> A buddha is capable of *jen*. Having skill and wisdom regarding the nature of excellent opportunities, s/he is able to break through the net of doubts snaring all sentient beings and depart from 'is', 'is-not' and other such bondages. Feelings of commonness and sageliness exhausted, person and thing entirely emptied...leaping over quantity and calculation, s/he is without obstruction in whatever s/he does. (TTC 45.406b).

By listing *jen* as the first quality of being a buddha--a person for whom all things are liberation, through whom all things are true Suchness--and by denying that this has anything directly to do with either our positional feelings of being 'common' or 'sagely' or any imputed difference between persons and things, Ma-tsu effectively orients our concern for enlightenment away from what happens **in any one of 'us'** to what happens **in-between**. What is remarkable about buddhas is not the status of their 'selves', but the quality of their relationships with others.

As Hall and Ames point out, in the context of traditional Chinese thought *jen* cannot legitimately be defined in terms of either subjective feelings (of benevolence, love and so on) or of objectively viewed ritual action, but points instead toward that "fundamentally integrative process" whereby the typically disintegrative preoccupations of what we have been referring to as the 'self' are transformed into the "sensibilities of the profoundly relational person." (1987:115) That is, the central value of the Confucian Chinese view of humanity resides neither in the inner cloister of the 'self' nor in the outer

impersonality of the 'public', but must be seen as an orientation toward what lies vibrantly in-between. By invoking the Confucian concept of *jen* as a leading attribute of buddhahood, Ma-tsu not only makes it clear that medititon is not to be seen as a means of divesting ourselves of our personal/worldly nature, but that enlightenment itself should not be seen as fundamentally private, but social--a function not of experience, but of conduct.

Granted both this and the formal similarity of the original Taoist and Buddhist meditation techniques, I would maintain that Chinese Buddhists would have initially--and in the case of Ch'an, persisted--in seeing meditation (*ting*) as a way of indirectly undermining both seeking and avoidance through focusing the mind outside of the pattern of distinctions on which the 'self' is grounded and thereby accumulating the energy necessary to finally make the leap to realising no-'mind' or unhindered social virtuosity. That is, I would argue that a deeply meaningful parallelism obtains between the Taoist injunction to "observe oneself" so that things can take care of themselves and Hui-neng's claim that the means of entering the bodhisattva life is nothing more complicated than settling (*ting*) the mind in order to concentratedly "see your own nature." In both cases, meditation is not seen primarily as a direct means to the transformation of consciousness--as an activity that necessarily bears experienced fruit--but as an indirect technique for transforming conduct. Meditation is not for the 'self' or for 'others', but for the whole out of which these have been discriminated.

While it is true that there are few direct references to energy in the classic Ch'an texts and no explicit description of meditation as "energy-work" or "indirection", this is hardly surprising both because these texts contain no practical descriptions of meditative techniques and because there is no need to explicitly mention what is essentially a cultural commonplace--the fact that health, freedom from suffering, and the conduct of

those around us are all functions of the balance or imbalance of our *ch'i*. What we do find, especially in the oral tradition, but also in Huang-po's Essential Teaching of the Transmission of Mind, is an association of not-seeking, not cutting-off others, and gathering the energy needed to be ready to realize our enlightenment which perfectly mirrors the context within which the pre-Buddhist, (and largely) Taoist Chinese tradition discussed the meaning of meditation.

For example, Huang-po was once reproached for teaching his students to not seek anything while at the same time insisting that they not "cut off others." His interlocutor's assumption being that if we don't seek anything at all, we can hardly engage in the intentional act of helping anyone and so effectively cut them off, Huang-po countered with the observation that, "If you don't seek anything, you're at rest....Look at the empty space before your eyes! Does it make cutting off others?" (T 2012.382b) That is, just as Chuang-tzu maintained that the emptiness of *ch'i*[B] is intimately connected with its ability to "wait on all things" and just as the *Huai-nan-tzu* associates a concentrated or non-moving mind with conduct that is *wu-wei*, in an appeal to the sky-like quality of enlightened mind, Huang-po allies not-seeking and being wholly open to and supportive of others. In short, the absence of seeking must be understood as tantamount to so thoroughly opening up our narration that everything without exception is accomodated and cared for.

Far from representing a lapse into the blankness of a catatonic's gaze or the unseeing concentration of a yogi who has attained the state of neither perception nor non-perception, not seeking anything is functionally equivalent to not rejecting anything, to not giving birth to or engendering (*sheng*) any distinctions. It is having a beginner's mind which has no inclination to push matters this way or that, but ingenuously (and almost eagerly) welcomes whatever comes its way. Living like this, Huang-po notes, has the

beneficial effect of "conserving the mind's energy (*ch'i*[B])." (T 2012.382b) That is, contrary to what happens when we invest our time and effort in controlling the present or imagining and maintaining a remembered past or a projected future, when we eschew all seeking we are never drained by whatever befalls us, but profoundly and unmitigatedly enhanced.

Later, Huang-po returns to the theme of energy and tells his students that:

> If you had at all times--whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down--just learned no-'mind', you would necessarily have actually attained something long, long ago. Because your energy is so low, you're not capable of the readiness to leap over. But if you get in three or five or perhaps ten years, you'd certainly attain an entry and be able to go on spontaneously. (T 2012.383c)

Huang-po does not specify here exactly what his students are to "get in three or five or ten years" of, but it would seem clear that it involves cultivating an understanding of no-'mind'--that is, having no fixed dispositions or patterns of discrimination--and that this has the consequence of alleviating their shortage of energy or *ch'i*[B]. Thus, the great adversary of Buddhist practice is not 'evil' or 'greed' or any of the other distinctions sedimented over the course of our (innumerable) lives, but what the Lankavatara refers to as habit-energy (*hsi-ch'i*[B])--the repetitive diversion of what would otherwise circulate and freely nourish the harmony of all things.

According to the terminology of Buddhist psychology, a mind that is fraught with distinctions is a mind that is both stained (marked with disintegration) and suppurating (Ch:*lou,* Skt:*asrava*)--a mind that is not beneficent or apt (*shan*) precisely because the energy needed for creative response is being discharged in continuous acts of discrimination.[10] Like hairline cracks running through a mirror, distinctions disappear as soon as we stop feeding energy into them. As long as we keep up a constant pressure, 'this' side of the mirror is obviously different from 'that' side and whatever it reflects

appears shattered. But the instant this pressure is removed, the world regains its wholeness, the mirror shines completely unblemished, and our hands are free to do whatever is necessary. Just so, diverting our attention away from our usual discriminatory preoccupations and focusing instead on one or another manifestation of the *ch'i* which brings about and connects all things, our own energy ceases to be spent on making and maintaining identity and difference. The 'self' begins to atrophy. Things begin taking care of themselves.

In a passage reminiscent of that quoted above from the *Hsin-hsu*, Huang-po indicates that once this leaking has been corrected and our mind regains its natural clarity (*ming*) and balance (*ho),* no further cultivation is necessary. "Having no-'mind' at all," he says, "is called non-draining (*wu-lou*) wisdom," (T 2012.383b) and once this wisdom has been realized, all horizons for readiness are naturally relinquished and we can "go on spontaneously" in the true practice of Ch'an. No longer bound by the distinction-generated horizons encircling and identifying the 'self', our minds are then "like the sun constantly circling through the empty sky. Naturally luminous, they do not reflect light, but radiate." (ibid.) And so, whereas the beginning student of Ch'an must be concerned with conserving the energy needed for concentration, Huang-po informs us that when the distinctions or 'selves' that inhibit our responding immediately to others have sufficiently atrophied, Ch'an is no longer "a matter of saving energy. When you arrive at this point, there is no place to anchor. It is conducting yourself as all the buddhas have." (ibid.)

If we are to relinquish our 'selves', then, all that is apparently needed is a technique for indirectly starving those patterns of distinctions on which they depend. But unlike the catatonic or severely schizophrenic person in whom self-identity has either been shut down or shattered as a survival mechanism in the face of either being forcibly starved of what is needed for normal self development or being subjected to influxes of

energy so great that they threaten to uncontrollably destroy the complex system of the self, the practitioner of Ch'an undertakes a 'self'-regulated course of concentration which indirectly leads to an atrophy of 'self' without rendering him or her incapable of sensitively responding to the needs of others. And so, instead of locking his or her energy in rigid and purposely impenetrable patterns of denial, the atrophy of 'self' is actually 'self'-affirmed.

As mentioned above, however, this freedom from 'self' cannot be negotiated by simply acting on impulse or trying to randomize our dealings with the world. While we can certainly take the energy flowing into and bound up by our ego-structure and blow it off in unthinking and entirely gratuitous acts--of, for example, debauchery or random violence--not only will each of these acts answer on some level to the dictates of our karma, they can never be truly responsive or creative and in this sense will only block our entry to the bodhisattva life. We may succeed in diminishing the amount of time we are conscious of our 'selves', but this in no way constitutes real freedom from selfishness--a criticism that can be directed with equal warrant toward the cultivation of so-called "selflessness" or altruism.

That is, while the hedonist may shift the locus of his selfishness to the lower chakras and endorse a policy of never checking his physical or sexual impulses, and the altruist may shift his to the higher chakras in a bid to render fully conscious every act of other-serving self-denial--neither manages to undermine the tendency to act on precedent. Even if the relevant distinction is as simple as that between what is liked and what is disliked, conduct remains essentially bound by the dictates of 'self'--a manifestation of karma or intentional repetition.[11] And so, while we must starve the constellation of distinctions out of which the 'self' emerges, we must do so without at the same time either creating blocks to the free flow of energy through our narration as a whole or simply

transferring the energy hitherto used for maintaining all of our distinctions into one or another set of these. In short, if we are to liberate the energy locked into the maintenance of the 'self', 'we' must engage in disciplined concentration.[12]

From what we can gather of the daily life of T'ang dynasty Ch'an, this function was performed by a combination of sitting meditation, chanting, and manual labor. Seen as energy work, Bodhidharma's wall-gazing, Hui-neng's months in the threshing room, and Ma-tsu's years of sitting ch'an were not forms of ascetic denial meant to disconnect them from social life. Nor were they forms of either self or other-induced punishment and humility or a hungry seeking for some experiential proof of enlightenment. Instead, they were understood in Ch'an as unique opportunities to starve the complex of distinctions underlying the manifestation of 'self' or ego without losing the energy bound up in it in random reaction. They should be seen, that is, as skilled indirection--loving deceptions by means of which 'we' are led to undermine our 'selves'.

B. Partnership, Shock Tactics, and One Finger Ch'an.

In Hui-neng's vocabulary, this is realising our "original nature" (*pen hsing*)--something which he clearly states is based on meditation (*ting*) and wisdom (*hui*) and yet that he readily admits not everyone is capable of pulling off on their own. In contrast to the Taoist tradition where no alternative or complement is explicitly mentioned to fasting the heart-mind, Ch'an openly recognizes the possibility that concentrative meditation and insight into the way things have come to be may not suffice for getting us to the point where we can indeed "go on spontaneously" as true bodhisattvas. That is, these techniques may not enable us to practice Ch'an in the sense of conducting ourselves as buddhas. Hui-neng is thus quite explicit that if we are not able to awaken ourselves, we must seek a great teacher who can help us see our true nature. Meeting such a teacher is,

he says, "the great causal event, the transformation which allows you to meet Buddha." (PS 31) In addition to the energy-work of meditation, chanting and manual labor, passing through the gate of Ch'an depends on joining with a master or masters in communicative concourse.

Recalling that in a Buddhist context, communication cannot legitimately be seen in terms of the transferral of information and that concourse is irreducibly improvisational in nature, the student-teacher relationship which Hui-neng refers to as the "great causal event" cannot be seen as mediated, as a function of giving and receiving various teachings. Indeed, while all of the Ch'an masters we have been concerned with thus far apparently gave public talks, none of them credited the teachings so delivered as being anything more than expedient means for "stopping the crying of babies." (TTC 45.408b) Far from being thought of as the crucial turning point at which the student is enabled to actually meet or manifest as Buddha (*chien fo*)[13], the teachings were seen as entirely topical palliatives. Intended only to sufficiently ease the discomfort of having a 'self' for the student to consistently employ one or another of the Ch'an techniques of indirection, the teachings were certainly an important prelude to opening up to the great causal event, but in no way definitive of it.

Thus, when Ma-tsu is asked what he says when his teaching "present mind is Buddha" has stopped the crying, he replies, "Not 'mind', not 'Buddha'." Should someone come along who has overcome these two poles, he indicates that he would "say it isn't a thing (*wu*[A])"--that is, something living **in** the world. Finally, if someone comes along from the Middle, Ma-tsu says he would then "instruct them to embody the Great Tao"--to actually **become** the Path, the entire process of liberation. (TTC 45.408b) All four teachings are meant to bring the student to the point where he or she will stop feeling sorry for him or herself, leave off thinking and searching, and simply allow their buddha-

nature to freely express itself. In no case is the student actually required to do more than absorb and then act on what the master has told them. In other words, the situation in which a master teaches a student simply does not open up the kind of responsive immediacy characteristic of true concourse.

It is for this reason, it would seem, that Huang-po suggests that the teachings are useful and attractive only for those whose energy is not yet sufficient to make the transition from being **born in** this world or that depending on our karma to actually **giving birth to** incomparable buddha-lands:

> When its energy is expended, an arrow falls back to earth, and the target attained in the coming life is not as intended. Once you leap over contention, apparent inaction and the 'gate of reality', you straightaway enter the land of the Tathagata. [But] because you are not such a person, you necessarily want to turn toward the gates of conversion established by the ancients and extensively study knowledge and distinctions. (T 2012.383b)

That is, only if our energy is insufficient for us to leap over the divisions crazing our narration and see it as a truly horizonless buddha-land do we grasp after the words of the great teachers. Hoping to find a map showing the way through our distinction-induced suffering--the key by means of which we may unlock the gate barring our passage on the Tao--our very hunger for knowledge and guidance is indicative of our lack of energy, of the extent to which we have isolated ourselves as 'selves'. Turning to the great masters, we hope to find some secret, some shortcut that will all at once allow us to quit taking a stand on the Path and instead to wander it freely and easily. But, as Huang-po points out, "If [we] don't meet a brilliant master who has gone beyond the 'world', [we] will have swallowed the medicine of the Mahayana in vain." (T 2012.383b) By themselves, the teachings will not help us.

Granted this and taking seriously Ch'an's millenia-long commitment to treasuring the "public cases" (*kung-an*) recounting the largely informal and impromptu meetings of

student and master, it would seem that the great causal event is best characterized as catalytic--as the introduction of some narrative element that brings about an unprecedented realization of practice while leaving no mark *(hsiang)* on the student, no remainder that is carried off as something acquired through the interaction. Like all catalysts, the master's actions are functionally inert in the sense that they are not taken directly up into the student's practice or enlightenment, but serve only to greatly hasten what would otherwise be a quite uncertain and very protracted affair. Ma-tsu's hitting and kicking, Nan-ch'uan's non sequitors, Chao-chou's "dry shit on a stick" and Lin-chi's rafter-lifting shouts are neither transmissions in the sense of insights passed down from generation to generation nor templates for or models of enlightened behaviour which are to be meticulously imitated. Instead, they must be seen as timely triggers or shock tactics which explode the preconceptions of their students and allow the energy pent up in their distinctions to be released into the horizonlessness of unselfish response to the needs of others.

As a catalyst, the master's conduct effectively "jump starts" the practice of Ch'an by momentarily opening us up enough that a non-deliberate response can occur. That is, the master forces us into a position where the energy 'we' have been conserving through our concentrative techniques can burst past the 'self'. We find ourselves doing or saying something completely unexpected and unplanned and yet perfectly in tune with the needs of our present situation. In short, we discover 'proof' of the reality of conduct that is *wu-wei*.

Now, reacting without deliberation is, of course, no problem--that, after all, is what we generally do in acting on the basis of established habits. It is only when our habitual ways of dealing with the world and the others populating it prove insufficient to the demands of the moment that we find it necessary to consider alternatives and weigh

options. Having "better things to do," in the absence of such demands or challenges, we simply don't bother to engage in any fresh thinking, analysis or planning. Instead, we quite contentedly allow our conduct to take an almost exclusively societal tack and live our lives essentially by rote. When this proves impossible, our first recourse is typically to reconceive our situation so that one of our systems of habitual reaction will in fact appear adequate, and only failing this will we begin the process of mapping out new patterns of reaction.

What this means, of course, is that we spend most of our lives either reacting to things along habitual lines or actively calculating the most efficient means of doing so. Whether the "costs" we calculate are counted in physical, sensual, intellectual, emotional or even spiritual currency does not alter the fact that our primary orientation is toward deciding what is relevant to 'our' happiness and then regulating experience to maximize its recurrence or maintenance. And for the most part, the power of calculative thought is such that 'we' are nearly always successful. To be sure, there are times when both habit and active rationality fail us and 'we' can navigate through a particular impasse only by an appeal to intuition or a retreat into madness. But in general 'we' manage well enough, and these forays into "irrationality" are few and far between.[14]

But, regardless of whether 'we' unconsciously appeal to habit and react to our situation in a non-deliberate way, or consciously appeal to the canons of a calculative rationality, 'we' remain fully within the horizons of activity that is *yu-wei*. What the master-student encounter is meant to bring about is, then, conduct which is immediate or non-deliberate without being habitual, and novel and responsive without being calculative. Otherwise, in the first case, 'we' effectively vanish but only at the cost of fixing our behaviour--rendering it fundamentally static. In the second, habit is indeed overcome, but only at the cost of indulging in 'self'-promoting deliberation. That is,

partnership with a Ch'an master should be seen as realising conduct that is both virtuosic and free of 'self'--a concursive interplay which 'we' can witness or experience, but not engineer.

When we approach a Ch'an master asking for admission to the community or for the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West and are answered with a kick, a shout, or a complete non-sequitor, any possibility of reasonable response is cut off. If the timing is right, this has the effect of shocking the meditation-attenuated 'self' into silence and opening up our narration in such a way that the energy we have been bleeding off from our habitual distinctions is liberated in truly creative and unintentional response. That is, 'we' are stopped in our tracks--undergoing at least a temporary dissolution of the horizons normally defining 'you' and 'I' as individuals--and witness the advent of conduct that is wholly without precedent. At this moment, student and master--Lin-chi's guest and host--become partners in lively concourse.

As documented in the public cases of Ch'an, this is often a cause of jubilation but almost never marks the end of discipleship. Delivered at a moment of maximum vulnerability--when the student is just arriving or turning to leave, or when he or she is bowing or standing before the sangha to engage in "dharma combat"--the shock precipitates a flash of content-free readiness in which the possibility of true communication can come to fruition. As Lin-chi makes very clear, this is the result of stealing away whatever it is that 'we' depend or rely on--whether it is form and ritual, the Dharma, our experiences in meditation, or our sense of individual identity:

> Sometimes I steal away the man but not the circumstances. Sometimes I steal away the circumsances but not the man. Sometimes I steal away both man and circumstance. Sometimes I steal away neither. (T 1985.497a)[15]

If the theft is successful, we find that the ground of discrimination has been pulled out from under us and that far from being a void or blank absence the resulting emptiness is a

bright and limitless responsivity. For a time, 'we' glimpse what it means to attain such social virtuosity that no matter where we stand everything becomes true (T 1985.498a)--what it means to be a person "who can ride all circumstances." (T 1985.499a)

But as the Chinese term (*ch'an-chi*[A]) for this perfectly timed assault on the 'self' indicates, this moment is unfortunately something artificial or contrived--*chi*[A] having the connotation of both "an opportunity" and "a machine"--and so very unlikely to last. For example, in Ma-tsu's case, while he attained a great awakening after years of diligent meditation by way of Nan-yueh's ruse of ostensibly polishing a roofing tile to make a mirror, he then continued to serve as the latter's attendant for ten years before going off on his own to teach. And so, while a well-timed shock from a master can temporarily paralyze the 'self' and spark the advent of real spontaneity in our narration, unless we are sufficiently free of discrimininatory and karmic blockages, the free circulation of energy characteristic of conduct that is *wu-wei* will eventually be interrupted and diverted back into the maintenance of 'selfish' activity. 'We' will regain our usual control over experience. Things will no longer be able to "take care of themselves."

Although we lose our naivette about the relationship of 'self' and practice in achieving even momentary concourse with an enlightened master, fully entering the bodhisattva life involves our being able to bring about such concourse with all beings at all times and in all situations. That is, we must be able to conduct ourselves **as buddhas**--as the initiators of enlightening partnership and not merely as its beneficiaries. This suggests, however, that while shock tactics as we have thus far described them are in most cases going to prove useful and perhaps necessary in a student's development, they are unlikely to be sufficient to bring about a permanent crossing of the threshold into Ch'an practice. With the reassertion of the 'self', our concourse with the master degenerates into a discursive relationship which--even if formally adequate--we cannot

but see as both qualitatively deficient and undeniably our own doing. That is, we recognize that it is our own 'selves' which interrupt the concourse by means of which our world is transformed into the undivided Suchness of a pure buddha-land.

At this point, continued shocks will prove successively less effective as a strategy for triggering a permanent relinquishing of the 'self'.[16] What is required instead is a means of getting the concentration-enfeebled 'self' to stand down of its own accord--to willingly step aside so that our narration can spontaneously repair itself as unimpeded concourse. In short, what is needed is the regular presentation of occasions for the 'self' to recognize its fundamental and unmistakeable incapacity for convincingly and effectively playing the role of bodhisattva.

Once we have witnessed the shock-induced expression of unprecedented conduct in our narrative, the possibility of imagining that 'you' and 'i' are absolutely essential to the resolution of either our own crises or those of others can no longer be seriously maintained. At the same time, however, as long as the challenges we experience to our own competency are intermittent, it is altogether possible to continue disavowing full responsibility for the quality of our conduct. In other words, we can persist in blaming others for the intractability of the problems we have with them, convinced that it is not our inadequacy, but their recalcitrance which keeps us locked into a fundamentally imbalanced and hence discursive mode of relationship.

It would seem that Ch'an's way of dealing with this was to put the student in the position of having to correct their teacher--to cease being a mere guest and successfully play the role of host. To this end, the master would often adopt a particular and unvarying way of dealing with students at this stage. For some, like Lin-chi, this meant always shouting in response to a query. For others, it meant always repeating the student's question, always contradicting the student, or always making the same expression or

gesture. Ch'an Master Chu-ti, for example, was known for always answering a question by raising his finger. In all such cases, the master is doing what each of us does countless times each day--reacting to new situations in virtually identical manners, effectively insensitive to their irreducible uniqueness. Instead of demonstrating the kind of improvisational genius idealized in the never-contradicted injunction to "accord with the situation and respond as needed," the master casts himself in the role of a mere sentient being, and the student is enjoined to do something truthful about it--to draw the master into the incomparable freshness of unbridled concourse.

Unlike fellow students or lay people who have yet to realize their own true nature, however, the master will accept nothing short of real spontaneity in response to his shouting or finger raising and for this 'we' must first step out of the way. Since any attempt to 'act spontaneously' entails a discursion of 'me' and 'what I'm going to do', not only does it commit us to acting *yu-wei*, it places an invisible and yet quite effective barrier between us. Concourse becomes impossible.

A unique demonstration not only of the use of shock tactics, but of the kind of conduct by means of which a student truly ceases being a mere guest in the house of Ch'an is found in the case of the awakening of Chu-ti's personal attendant. As the story goes, Chu-ti's attendant was a young boy who every morning would rise early, make the daily rice, sweep the area in front of their hermitage and then sit nearby while the master greeted and instructed his visitors. Every day, the same scene was repeated: a monk or layperson would arrive to ask Chu-ti some question or seek some guidance and he invariably responded by holding up his index finger. One day Chu-ti announced that had to visit a friend and asked the boy to tell anyone who came to return the following day. The boy, however, figured that he had seen enough of Chu-ti's method to be able to perfectly well play the role of the host and so spent the whole day greeting visitors with

his upraised finger. When Chu-ti returned and asked how things had gone, the boy demonstrated his understanding. Chu-ti pulled out his knife and in a flash had severed the upraised finger, at which instant the boy is said to have attained a great awakening.

When Chu-ti returns and finds that his attendant has taken on his own role--that of the host or master, he immediately adopts the stance of the keen-eyed student--a guest capable of breaking through the obdurate regularity of his host's behaviour. Greeted with the knee-jerk reaction of a raised finger, Chu-ti literally cuts off the habit at its root--demonstrating not only his ability to not get sucked into the meaninglessly discursive pattern in which a guest 'circles' the host trying to figure out what the latter's gesture signifies, but also his ability to shock his 'host' into illumination. In short, by allowing the boy to play the role of host, Chu-ti is able to demonstrate not only how a guest overcomes the habits of his 'host' and brings about true--that is correcting or enlivening--concourse, he enables the boy to understand what it really means for him to be a student or guest. Taking on the role of guest, Chu-ti again becomes a master; taking on the role of host, the boy finally realizes what it means to be a guest. And at this unanticipateable moment, guest and host both disappear in the concursive spontaneity of conduct that is truly *wu-wei.*

Thus, unlike the phase of Ch'an partnership in which shock tactics are used by a master as master to precipitate a flash of spontaneous conduct for the benefit of the student, by engaging in such a role reversal the master here forces the student to repeatedly confront someone who refuses to open up, who refuses to do anything but reiterate themselves or monkey the actions of those around them. In order to get around this impasse, the student must become a true host--someone capable of bringing about the awakening of others. In a word, the student must go beyond merely attaining awakening and directly realize what it means to be a bodhisattva. As long as the s/he tries responding

on the basis of what is 'known' or 'understood'--on the basis of what Mead refers to as the "me" (1934:175, for example)--the master will either keep repeating him or herself or will simply dismiss the student as unready. Ultimately, the pivotal break by means of which this uneasy discourse is transmuted into concourse can occur only when the meditation-attenuated and shock-prepared 'self' has exhausted all of its options and simply stops trying. Then the student unhesitatingly realizes his or her true "I" in conduct that is completely unpredictable and yet marvelously adept. The famous Ch'an gate (*kuan*, literally a "frontier pass") turns out to have all along been gateless (*wu-men*)--a product of our own horizon-bound imagination.

CHAPTER 10
CONCLUSION

As soon as we realize the gatelessness of Ch'an, we discover who we truly are. Whereas we have until this moment thought of ourselves as 'selves'--as the central players on whose thoughts and feelings pivot the action of a myriad separate and only partially overlapping dramas--we now fully understand that since each thing interdepends with everything else and since nothing has any abiding self-nature, there is really nothing which separates us, no barriers but those we create. In short, we realize that we are buddhas--not individual and locateable 'sentient beings' cast at birth onto the stage of an independent and objective world, but unfathomable and enlightening persons.

Thus, in speaking to his students about entering the practice life, Lin-chi says:

> If you want to be able to freely be born or die, to go or stay, to take off or put on (this or that body, clothes, mood, position, etc.), then right now perceive **who is listening to this teaching**. S/he has no form, no marks, no roots or origin and no abiding status. Flexible and lively, her/his responses are established [in accordance with] the ten thousand kinds of things, only the place from which s/he functions is, in fact, no 'place' at all. For this reason, if 'you' search for her/him, s/he retreats ever further away. So s/he is called mysterious. (T 1985.498c, emphasis added)

Functioning from no 'place', a bodhisattva cannot be identified. Having no form or special qualities, no fixed origin or status, a bodhisattva should never be conceived of as 'someone' who acts in this or that ideal fashion, but as virtuosic responding in the absence of any 'one' who responds. Hence Lin-chi's oft repeated injunction to perceive who is listening right now and the equation of this [who] with enlightened and hence enlightening conduct. Whereas asking his students to perceive who **sees** the individual delivering the teaching might lead to a occlusive focus on their mutually exclusive

perspectives on him and ground the continued isolation of each student from all the others, it is the nature of hearing that the importance of position or perspective is minimized. Whether sitting to the left or right, in front or behind the speaker, we all hear the same words. But perhaps more importantly, it is also the case that while only the audience can see Lin-chi speaking, **everyone present**--Lin-chi included--is listening to the teaching. The freedom of which Lin-chi speaks--the freedom of having no 'self'--means realizing that our true body excludes no one or any thing.

Unlike Thomas Nagel's (1987) purely rational agent who takes up an ideally unbiased vantage from which it is possible to see things "as they are" and arrive at agreements about matters of mutual concern with other such agents, a bodhisattva doesn't dwell anywhere and so cannot be said to have a view at all--even one from "nowhere". Whereas Nagel assumes the continued (if presumably abstract) presence of a centrally located self who subjectively possesses the knowledge garnered from the standpoint of someone no longer bound by the contingencies of a body, a place in history and so on, a bodhisattva is not a subject standing over and against an objective world making decisions about what to do in or with it, but conduct without remainder. And so, far from being disembodied spirit or pure consciousness, buddhas and bodhisattvas have the entire, irreducibly dynamic world as body--what Ma-tsu referred to as the wondrous functioning (*miao yung*) in and through which all things are liberation. (TTC 45.406b)

It cannot be reiterated strongly enough that persisting in thinking of a buddha or bodhisattva as an individual who acts or responds is to identify or 'place' him or her and thus to set up the precedent for thinking that 'we' can somehow go from where we are to where they are--that 'we' can somehow acquire their abilities or freedom. As Lin-chi makes quite clear, nothing could be further from the truth. Becoming a bodhisattva and conducting ourselves as buddhas--that is, realizing Ch'an practice--is not something 'you' and 'i' can do. To the contrary, 'we' cannot even seek such a goal without driving it further

out of reach--like a dog trying to catch its shadow or (to use Huang-po's imagery) a warrior seeking a pearl which all the time is on his own forehead.

Far from being the culmination of a linear series of incremental changes--an event brought about or caused through the intervention of our will, realizing the virtuosic freedom that is our true nature marks a kind of gestalt shift signifying our having ceased identifying ourselves with any locale, any set of qualities, any set aims, favored experiences or desired statuses. In much the same way that the transition from seeing the 'same' drawing now as two women facing one another in profile and now as a single vase is not mediated by a point by point reinterpretation of the dots and lines out of which the drawing is composed, the 'transition' from the life of a sentient being to that of a bodhisattva is not a function of getting closer or straying further away, but an immediate reconfiguration of our narration **as a whole**. That is, the change is not a matter of adding or subtracting anything from our lives or personalities, but of reorienting. In a word, the transition is not fudamentally ontic, but axial.

It must be stressed that in a Buddhist context, since no substantial ground or purely objective 'reality' is assumed to underlie our evaluations, saying that the leap from the standpoint of a sentient being to conducting ourselves as buddhas is a function of how we see ourselves does **not** have a negative connotation. A change that occurs with a shift of orientation or perceptual gestalt is not inferior to or any less real or (in a Buddhist sense) meaningful than one in which the relevant 'facts' are altered--where we "redraw the picture" instead of just seeing it anew. For the Ch'an Buddhist, the former ("redrawing") is ultimately dependent on the latter ("seeing anew")--not vice versa--and much more difficult to pull off. Of course, while the charge that a gestalt shift is fundamentally solipsistic is warranted and intelligible only where the subject-object distinction is maintained and where a level of 'brute fact' is taken for granted, it is nevertheless true that from a Buddhist perspective there is no more inconsistency in my seeing a present event

as 'ill' and your seeing 'the same' event as 'good' as there is in our having the 'two women' and 'single vase' views of a drawing. Reality is not objective and singular, but irreducibly ambiguous. It is for us to make it 'good' or 'ill' or, better yet, to avoid the dichotomy altogether.

It is only in such a light that we can understand the unremitting insistence in Ch'an that nothing needs to be either sought **or** cut off. Living as a bodhisattva does not necessarily involve either getting hold of or getting rid of anything, but a liberating redirection of the manner in which all of the elements of our world are being narratived. What changes are not 'things' or 'people'--the dots and lines comprised by our life stories--but their meaning.

Were this not the case--if, in other words, it was necessary or even invariably desireable to bring about 'real' changes in the circumstances of our world for liberation to be realized--then a bodhisattva would have the unenviable job of acting as a kind of round-the-clock cosmic social worker and jack-of-all-trades. While it might not be enough to see someone working for an altruistic cause and 'positively' altering the situations in which people live in order to decide that they are a bodhisattva, if someone failed to openly work along such lines it would be clear that they would not qualify to be so designated.

If, however, the real source of suffering as narrative interruption is not ultimately **what** occurs, but a lack of the virtuosity and/or energy to play along with whatever arises, matters are not so simple. To the contrary, since our narration is interrupted only when response is cut short--when the energy generated in concourse is blocked from circulating freely--and since such blockages always pivot on relatively fixed distinctions which are themselves rooted in projections of value marking one or another form of resistance to meaning, ending suffering is best accomplished through undercutting distinction itself and not through further inculcating it by working to stabilize and maintain the 'good' and

elimininate 'ill'. That is, it is only from the unenlightened perspective of immersion in so-called objective distinctions that some factual change--be it material, moral, or spiritual--needs to be brought about for liberation to be realized.[1]

In the favored terminology of Ch'an, this is as much as to say that our original mind is continuously and by itself (*tzu jan*) completely bright, shining everywhere, leaving no shadow. Unlike Shen-hsiu's mind/mirror which he sees as obscured by various dusts and so constantly in need of cleaning, realizing our original mind in Ch'an is tantamount to understanding that as long as we keep responding as needed--as long, that is, as we maintain a completely improvisational relationship with all that occurs--'dust' is in fact no-'dust', form is already emptiness. It is only because we are in the habit of stopping at what 'we' can see or hear or be aware of or know and taking **'that'** to be reality that the essential brilliance of our own original body (*pen t'i*) goes unperceived (T 2012.380b) and we are blocked from seeing our lives **as** enlightened. At bottom, it is our commitment to objectifying the experienced and seeing all change in mediate terms that prohibits our realization of who we truly are.

For this reason, Huang-po emphatically insists that, "If you would just have no-'mind'"--that is, drop all of your distinctions--"your original body would appear by itself." (T 2012.380b) When 'mind' no longer obtains, all divisions, all of our "objective" differences and separations are undone. No longer capable of identifying ourselves as this or that individual who must act for anything to get done, no-'mind' means realizing that we are the entire world--a buddha-land which freely and creatively takes care of itself. In short, the bodhisattva life--the realization of unbound personhood--can be seen as unmitigated spontaneity. In it, all relations are improvised and all conduct social. What matters is just that things keep flowing together--that no interruptions occur which become fixed or habitual--and so no particular circumstances have to be maintained or aimed for. There is no need to judge anything--to divide what is seen, heard, made

conscious or known into things to be grasped or rejected--but only to remain open to the freely circulating joy of limitless concourse. Then, not approaching anything, not withdrawing, not dwelling or being attached, "from north to south and from east to west, all by itself there will be no place that is not the place of enlightenment." (ibid.)

Inverting the usual premises on which altruism is typically undertaken, from the perspective of realized Ch'an, the buddha-work simply does not depend on the presence or alteration of particular circumstances--no more so at least than the shift in gestalt from two women to a single vase requires an alteration of the line drawing as such. Only if we canonize one version is it necessary to render the situation (the drawing) unambiguous by adding or subtracting certain distinctions which make the other view impossible to maintain. The problem with this, of course, is that no matter how 'humane' or 'unselfish' or 'sacred' our motives are, by enforcing any particular bias we in the long run create a progressively rigid world more and more deeply prone to interruption. Once the work of promoting the 'good' and excluding the 'ill' is begun, not only do we find there is always something else needing our attention, it will seem increasingly the case that ever greater efforts are needed to realize ever lesser results. In the 'worst' case scenario, we eventually enter a living 'hell'--a kind of grid-lock in which the distinctions out of which we have built the circumstances of our lives are so dense and command so much of the natural flow of energy through our narrative that a nearly infinite amount of time and effort would seem necessary to solve the problems we feel impending.

It is often at this point, of course, that a conversion occurs. Driven to completely giving up the attempt to make things better, there is often experienced a 'spontaneous' transformation of our lives which mimics the sort of sustainable release set up through the Ch'an techniques of indirection and partnership. Depending on our situation, we may chalk this transformation up to luck and simply take up where we left off in trying to control our experience, or we may attribute it to some form of divine intervention and do

our best to humble our 'selves' in the face of superior forces. In virtually all such cases, however, this transformation is understood as a power-mediated alteration of the ontic dimension of our lives and the sense we have of ourselves tends to remain that of isolated individuals who can enter into relationship with others and not as pure and unprecedented conduct having no fixed location.

Tanabe Hajime's (1986) account of such metanoetic experiences makes a good case for their religious and societal efficacy--at least when they are most intensely realized---and by drawing on both the Christian and Pure Land Buddhist traditions serves as an intriguing bridge between what have hitherto been typically disparate world views. But as his analysis makes clear, such transformations--especially when preceeded by the 'practice' of repentence--tend to reinforce the 'self'/'other' dichotomy and hence inhibit the realization of who we are in the fullest Ch'an sense. Instead of realizing that we are an entire world the meaning of which can be changed without the least application of factual power, we tend to see ourselves as dependent parts of a world in which we have what are "all too obvious" limits to what we can do. For Ch'an, the advent of the bodhisattva life marks the dissolution of the 'self-power'/'other-power' distinction itself and with it the conviction that matters never get any better unless someone does (*tso*) something about them. In short, change ceases to be seen as something necessarily brought about through any kind of force, and is realized instead as self-presencing or free and easy (*tzu-tsai*).

For the Ch'an Buddhist, then, being a bodhisattva means totally unprecedented and unforced freedom in improvising the mergence of previously disparate worlds.[2] Not bound by any circumstances or societal norms or status, the Ch'an bodhisattva is free to enter either the ordained or lay life, to be a prince or a pauper, to frequent either the court or the brothel. And because of this--because the conduct or narrative movement that we refer to as "bodhisattva" is not *yu-wei*--no factual situation is inherently superior to or inferior to any other. For the true bodhisattva, any circumstance can serve as the

bodhimandala, no disharmony is irresolvable.[3] In Lin-chi's famous phrase, s/he is a "true person of no rank" (*wu-wei^A-chen-jen^A*)--a person who has no fixed place from which s/he acts, no set patterns of behaviour or unchanging tasks and goals.

Asked once by a monk who exactly this person with no rank is, Lin-chi lept down off his dias, began throttling the monk and demanded that he "Speak! Speak!" When the monk failed to respond immediately, Lin-chi thrust him away, exclaiming, "What kind of dry shit stick is this true person of no rank!" (T 1985.496c) That is, Lin-chi's initial response is not to objectify the true person of no rank by saying something **about** him, but to unhesitatingly leap into action. Jumping down from his 'place' above the assembly, he adopts the posture of a highway bandit, takes the monk by the throat and demands that this latter 'one' speak--that he do what the circumstances would seem to make impossible. In order to successfully respond, the monk must drop his own 'role'--that of the 'one' being victimized--and enter true partnership with Lin-chi, directly resolving in conduct this unexpectedly confrontational turn in their relationship.

By relinquishing his own place or rank and opening himself to the complete unpredicability of unconstrained concourse, Lin-chi not only demonstrates how a true person of no rank replies to the objectifications of others, by directly challenging the monk to give up his precious 'self' and respond in kind, he provides the opportunity for the monk to become the host, to enlighten their shared narrative by entering into creative partnership. But in this case, the monk hesitates, evidencing his own debilitating lack of confidence, his inability to meet Lin-chi's offer of immediate and unprecedented concourse. In short, he remains bound by the constraints of what is appropriate and inappropriate, what is 'me' and 'mine' and what is 'you' and 'yours'. Hemmed in on all sides by the distinctions through which we generate and identify our 'selves', the monk fails to realize his nature as bodhisattva and the "essential brilliance" of his original nature remains obscured. 'Thief' and 'victim' remain bound together and yet undeniably

held apart; in contact and yet incapable of concourse. In Lin-chi's graphic phrasing, the true person of no rank has gone into hiding, taking on the utterly useless form of an ass-wiping stick covered with dried shit.

Lin-chi makes it quite clear here and in other of his recorded conversations that the monk's mistake occurs the instant he hesitates--the instant the narrative movement already underway is interrupted in a silent query about where it should or can be taken. We may see ourselves in such situations as being held at bay, as thrown back on ourselves, but in fact it is the unpredictability of *wu-wei* that is being held at arm's length and it is ultimately our own doubt which is responsible. Turning outward in search of guidance or precedents is fruitless:

> Do you want to discern the Buddha and patriarchs? They none other than the one who here listens to my teachings. Since you students haven't attained confidence in yourselves, you face outward and run around searching. If your seeking succeeds, you'll only obtain the victorious forms of cultural precedents (*wen*) and written words (*tzu*^{A}). In the end, you won't attain the meaning of any living patriarch. (T 1985.497b)

That is, while we may manage to accurately imitate a Ch'an master or a buddha, the resemblance so engineered will be merely formal. In terms of their factual basis our words and actions may agree point for point with that of an enlightened person, but they will not have the same meaning and the conduct in which they figure will continue to proceed *yu-wei*.

And yet turning inward is no more effective in bringing about the realization of our buddha-nature. Lin-chi is quite uncompromising in reviling:

> the bald-headed yes-men who once they've eaten their fill of rice will sit down to meditate and practice contemplation. They fix their hearts, take hold of the stream of thought and don't allow it to arise. They abhor noise, seek quiet, attain samadhis and so on, but these are all beside the point...if you fix the mind to observe quietude, or if you arouse the mind to outwardly reflect (on things), or if you control the mind to be inwardly lucid, or if you concentrate the mind to enter

samadhi, going on like this is just **making** (things, karma, etc.). Who is right now listening to my teaching? (T. 1985.499b)

Thus, as long as we think that the Buddha--the one who is listening--is something objective or outside, we are wrong. If we take the Buddha to be something subjective or inside, we are still wrong. And retreating into the logical cul-de-sacs of "both" or "neither" is only to compound our error. Instead, we must drop every pretense of separation or difference and identity. Abandoning our 'selves' in the incomparable liveliness of unalloyed improvisation and "never faltering for even an instant, our pure and clear brilliance penetrates everywhere in the ten directions and the 10,000 things are one Suchness." (T 1985.498b) This is what is meant in Ch'an by the so-called "awakening of faith" (*ch'i*^{A}*-hsin*^{A})--the realization of what Huang-po meant in saying both that "all the buddhas and sentient beings are just one-mind" (T 2012.379c) and that not obtaining a single thing is what we call "buddha" or "the transmission of mind." (T 2012.383a) No amount of skilled mimicry of the great masters and recitations of their infamous phrases can substitute for this--the realization of complete non-reliance (*wu-i*^{A}) (T. 1985.498c), the burgeoning of true Suchness (*chen ju*).

Throughout his recorded conversations, Lin-chi again and again returns to the image of the "true person without rank who goes in and out through the gates of your faces," (T 1985.496c) insisting that it is this "one functioning right before your eyes [who] is not different from the buddhas and patriarchs." (T 1985.500c) If for even an instant we can drop the pretense of being an individual, relinquishing all of the horizons we have projected in identifying ourselves as the center of experience, we realize that we are everything that is right now occurring. "What goes in and out of the gates of our faces" does not refer, then, to some spiritual substance or soul that enters and exits the body, but is simply a striking locution for the constant movement we refer to as our "lives"--a movement which implies both subject and object, perceiver and perceived,

actor and acted upon, but which cannot be reduced to any of these. That, Lin-chi insists, is who we truly are. That is the Buddha.

But to say that this functioning (*yung*) is who we really are--a true person of no rank--is to say that we are just the movement of our narration. That is, who we really are is "how things are going." We are not ultimately the 'one' who experiences our life story--whether as its principle character or its variously impersonated author--but its very ongoingness. If our world includes locally or globally intractable suffering and abyssmal unhappiness, instances of physical or emotional abuse both calculated and random, families in which no one speaks to one another and cities in which homeless men, women, and children sleep on the sidewalks outside of museums housing the work of our greatest artists--that is who we are, even if we don't identify any of these situations or events as in any way 'our' own, as our responsibility.

Conversely, if our world is like the buddha-lands described by Vimalakirti--lands in which even foul smells, wordy treatises and the antics of the four Maras can do the work of a buddha (VS Ch. 11)--that, too, is who we are. At any moment, we can tell exactly who we are--whether a buddha or a sentient being or even a devil--by simply perceiving what is right before us. And yet because all things are in constant flux, what distinguishes a buddha and a sentient being is not what is **happening** in the sense of the momentary or present status of his/her narrative, but rather the direction of its occurance--whether toward the regulative differences and identities implied in discursion or the realized non-dualism of improvised concourse. In a word, the contrast is not one of fact, but meaning--never something contained in an event, utterance or intention, but played out as the unpredictable unfolding of our lives as communicative wholes.

Huang-po and Lin-chi both call this movement or functioning "mysterious" or "profound" (*miao*) because it finally has no fixed roots or ground, no set fruit or aim. That is, unlike 'selfish' activity which always implies a movement from-to--an incremental

change defineable in terms of the linear addition or subtraction of various elements of experience--the functioning referred to as "a true person with no rank" is not a vectoral or intentional translation of values into existence, but a "seamless essential clarity." (T 2012.382a)

As sentient beings attached to the centrality of our 'selves' we typically break this seamless whole up into the six senses and their objects, constituting a world of differences and divisions out of which we attempt to manufacture harmonious places of refuge--sometimes outer and sometimes inner--but always at the price of creating the unavoidable complexes of experiential disposition referred to as "karma." But as buddhas we are worlds in which there are no hindrances and in which there is at the same time no creation of 'a seamless, essential clarity' as something known and opposed to the world of distinctions. (T 2012.382a) Thus, we can freely enter any situation without any of the differences and distinctions projected there being able to stymie or turn us back. (T 1985.498b) Then, anything at all can accomplish the work of enlightenment: no limit can be found at which liberating virtuosity is cut off. In short, Lin-chi's true person of no rank is simply conduct that is wholly *wu-wei*--narrative movement in which all 'things' are continually emptied and so in which there are no obstructions and nothing which needs to be done.

Enlightenment should never be conceived, then, as something which we acquire through our actions and effort and which then enables us to help others alleviate their suffering. That way of seeing matters is--at least from the Ch'an perspective--entirely mistaken. Instead, enlightenment is given directly in conduct, in the movement of our entire narration. Thus Pai-chang quotes the scriptures as saying, "Liberate one and 10,000 follow. Confuse one and 10,000 are deluded....This is the wonder of the path of awakening." (HTC 119.425b) If there ultimately are no individuals, but only the continual unfolding of the narration that we speak of as the one or whole-mind (*i-hsin*),

there can be no solitary salvation--no private liberation which is attained at some special 'here' and then spread out to encompass 'others'.

Indeed, the constant references in the Mahayana texts favored by Ch'an (the Flower Ornament, Lotus and Vimalakirti sutras, for example) to miraculous powers of interpenetration, of instantaneous travel, and of manifesting innumerable bodies are all just objective ways of describing the non-propagational and hence non-intentional nature of enlightening conduct. Ultimately, the transmission of mind referred to by Huang-po is not a linear chain--an understanding of the process of enlightenment that was symbolically debunked with Hui-neng's refusal to pass on his robe and bowl--but communication in the sense of unprecedented concourse in which everything is always changing at once and in which it is thus impossible to say that anything is ever obtained. Being always whole and yet never unchanging, as an unbroken, radiant clarity through which nothing is attained or arrived at, the mind of enlightenment can only be seen as unmitigated contribution or offering. It is that into which 'we' are taken up, and not something 'you' and 'i' cause or even discover.

And so it is said that we know we are at the point of attaining buddhahood when we "let go with both hands"--when we cease trying to take in or gather anything while remaining uncompromisingly responsive to the needs of our present and constantly evolving situation. Ch'an enlightenment should never be seen as a result, but as that constantly renewed conduct by means of which an entire world is realized as thoroughly social, as a self-creating, free and easy harmony about which we can only be mistaken the instant we try to point it out or exclaim, "this is it!"

NOTES TO PREFACE

1. The term *kang* has the primary connotation of the drawstring or cord used to close a net. By extension, it came to mean a bond or tie, laws or principles, the social nexus holding a family or community together and making it a functional whole.

2. One of the historical considerations which casts some doubt on the veracity of either of these views is the fact Ch'an never idealized the life of a homeless wanderer but rather placed itself squarely at the vanguard of monastic Buddhism. That is, the daily life of a Ch'an practitioner--whether ordained or lay--was understood as basically communal in nature, as part of the overall architecture of society and not as a refutation or escape therefrom. Indeed, Pai-chang's monastic code strongly suggests that Ch'an understood itself not as living outside of and yet wholly dependent upon the marketplace, but as contributing directly to it.

Objecting that this emphasis on community was less a reflection of Ch'an orthodoxy than of the prevailing politico-economic conditions and the Confucian social fabric of which they were a part is effective only as long as Ch'an is presumed to be in some sense originally discontinuous with them--as long, that is, as Ch'an is taken to be Buddhist (and hence genetically Indian) first and only secondarily Chinese. Part of the thesis forwarded in the early chapters is that Ch'an is not a kind of transplanted Buddhism which took root in and was subsequently transformed by Chinese soil, but a hybrid way of life or spirituality which was first and foremost Chinese.

3. Thus, we entertain telepathy as an ability to know the contents of other minds but not as the realization of an absence of the differences or distance on which 'otherness' is predicated. That is, 'I' may come to know 'your mind' in the absence of any messages being transmitted in an objectively identifiable medium, but the distinction of these 'minds' remains unblemished.

4. According to this understanding, our mental operations never do any more than reflect or identify a small portion of the conceptual, emotional and aesthetic dimensions of our world, just as the organic biases of our eyes and ears selectively determine what is 'seen' and 'heard'. Our experience is no more an exhaustive indication of what occurs as conduct than a documentary film about the killing fields of Cambodia captures the meaning of the Khmer Rouge's ideological campaign.

5. On the distinction of narrative and narration as 'self'-articulated and personally realized, see especially Chapters 1 and 4. In brief, narrative involves and entails the maintenance of relevant distinctions or things (*dharmas*) through their structural closure and are in significant measure calculative in nature. By contrast, narration should be seen as the erasure of such horizons, an opening. Narration is concursive process; narrative is discursive product.

6. "Original" in this context does not necessarily connote absolute discontinuity with what preceded it or an inherently positive valuation. To the contrary, the present work is original in the sense of arising out of (L:*oriri*) the tradition and not being about it.

7. This last claim will surely arouse some intellectual ire for which I here apologize, but in actuality the claim is no more controversial than that fully understanding the merits of quantum mechanics involves being trained to be able to at first perform and eventually design the kinds of experiments by means of which quantum physics is practiced.

Nothing is more obvious, after all, than that we only understand what is uniquely worthwhile and even important about a game--be it chess, golf, or even dating--when we have sufficiently mastered its rudimentary skills to be able to play it with delicious self-abandon. The skeptic is always one who has staunchly refused to drop his or her objectivity and simply become intimate with whoever and whatever they encounter.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE

1. In terms to be defined below, I would argue that rather than providing any substantive goals, the eight-fold path names the cardinal points of the practice of emptiness--the practice of relinquishing all horizons for relevance. For more on this, see Chapter 5.

2. This point--the difference between substantialist ontology and a relational ontology of the type proper to Buddhism will be one focus of Chapter 4.

3. Such moves have, of course, come under considerable and highly critical scrutiny in the works of the hermeneutics tradition, a scrutiny given indirect but powerful warrant by the widely accepted conviction in the philosophy of science that all facts are theory-laden, including those supporting the universality of suffering.

4. From this, it follows that if the Buddha is seen as the paradigm of personhood in Buddhism, our typical self-conception--relying as it does on marking ourselves off from others--cannot serve as a proper model for understanding Buddhist personhood. Rather, our idea/ideal of person and the egoic experience of existing are both functions of culturally and individually informed horizons for relevance--what in the notation that will be developed in Chapter 4 we will refer to as 'persons'.

5. Seen in this light, Hegel's quite astute observation of the absolute ubiquity of the master-slave relationship reveals itself as a caricature rooted in one particular conception of consciousness, not in consciousness or spirit *per se*.

6. For more on this distinction, see Chapter 3.

7. The reader may also want to consider Kalupahana's (1992) chapter on "Dignaga's Epistemology and Logic".

8. Thus, as terms of art, narrative--a thing told and hence which decides--will be associated with the doings of the self, while narration--what we will later describe as a mode of envaluation--will be allied with the harmony realizing improvisation of Buddhist personhood. Narratives distinguish 'selves' while narration fosters the interpenetration (*t'ung*) of all things--the realization of what Ch'an master Huang-po refers to as *i-hsin*, or "one-mind".

9. I would argue, in fact, that the Buddhist doctrine of the three marks is based on just such a realization. The three marks do not constitute a short catalogue of characteristics which are unrelated to one another in an intimate sense, but form a functional system. The emphasis within Buddhism on *anātman* suggests that the central problematic of suffering is related to our idea or ideal of personhood--that is, that it is a cultural construct erected within the unique frameworks of each of our individual life histories. To say that all things are impermanent (*anitya*) is to say that there is no free zone, no place of permanence to which we can retreat. Crises will continually occur and our only options are to either creatively incorporate them into our lives or to allow our lives to be destructively altered by their interruption. The mark of selflessness entails that there is no set identity to preserve or prohibit adaptive or creative change. We need have no fear of improvising. Impermanence entails that there is no shortage of energy for change. The process of existing is continuously operative. Suffering entails that there will always be irruptions of chaos, the occurrence of crises to stimulate evolution. Creativity is opened

by realizing the ubiquity of the three marks. It might well be argued that the thrust of the teaching of the three marks it to lay the foundation for the creative transformation of culture (especially in its interpersonal/social dimension).

10. On the origination of persons in conversation, see for example the quite different analyses offered by Mead (1934) and Charles Taylor (1985), neither of whom, however, emphasize the narrative aspect of conversational encounter. It should also be noted at this point that the description just given of persons is somewhat at odds with that which will be developed in the succeeding chapters where it will be argued that the implied objectification of our lives or selves necessarily runs contrary to that full and unmediated engagement with others upon which sociality and personal development ultimately depend.

11. Circumstantial evidence for this is found in the admission that the occurrence of at least certain emotions is karmically conditioned--that our happiness, unhappiness, anger and sorrow can be seen as depending on our prior intentional activity. Emotions, seen in this way, are clearly responsive and not merely reactions or accidents.

12. In certain orthodox Indian philosophies, such detachment seems to be valorized. The true self is not moved by experience, nor does it act in any literal way. The Upanishadic analogy of the true self to the bird seated on a branch dispassionately observing another bird epitomizes this view. Only by cutting oneself off from the necessity of responding to others--by being able to write one's own story without any outside contribution--is the ideal of complete equanimity possible.

13. Part of the contest between the so-called Hinayana and Mahayana has had precisely to do with whether it has seemed possible and/or desirable to achieve freedom from suffering as an individual. According to the proponents of the Mahayana, it is definitely not desirable. The bodhisattva life as usually conceived is nothing short of a refusal to countenance such a desire as laudable or truly Buddhist. But as articulated here and consistent with the persuasions of Ch'an, such a private realization of liberation is indeed not even possible. As transformations of conduct, both suffering and its resolution must be seen as irreducibly personal/communal.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. That is, from the perspective of an outsider-stander. From such a perspective, cultures condition individual 'persons', forming a context for their emergence. But when persons are seen as worlds, such a point of view cannot be maintained. Then, person and culture are only arbitrarily distinguishable.

2. This objectification of actual suffering out of which we derive material for the egoic authoring of our life stories provides, however, the possibility of thinking or talking about and not resolving the interruption--a phenomenon taken to a morbid extreme with certain obsessions or depressions and which is arguably becoming epidemic in our society. Like the man discovered by the Buddha with an arrow sunk deep in his chest, we want to discuss how it happened and who is to blame rather than pulling out the arrow and allowing the healing process to truly get underway.

3. It should be noted that it is exceedingly rare for any of us to have a single narrative thread connecting all of our experiences and activities. Even having a single main thread is quite uncommon. Rather, as persons we are more like threads made up of multiple strands, some of which are continuous over long periods of time, others of which, like the short bits of wool that are spun into yarn, achieve the appearance of continuity only when seen from a sufficient distance.

4. The social-societal distinction and the contrast of interpersonal and institutional orientations shall be discussed at length in the following chapter.

5. One of the advantages of such a definition is that it is equally consistent with the both the most elaborate of the systems of thought on reincarnation (say the Tibetan) and with the most extreme hard-line materialism.

6. For more on the ontological underpinnings of this claim, see Chapter 4.

7. I prefer the word "recursive" here to the more commonly used "reflexive." It is typical that one of the traits commonly ascribed to persons is self-reflexivity, their ability to think about or reflect on themselves. Yet this only forces us to beg the question: "Is a person something that can think about itself--that is something that is apart from its thinking--or are persons the very folding back itself?" The term self-reflexive seems to me to be a part of the vocabulary of substantialism, of the being of essences. In narrative terms, it implies that a person is someone who tells a story--the author of their tale--and not the narrative itself. It is imperative to note here that a recitation of facts is not a story. to begin with, facts are objective data which presume a subject who "knows" or "discovers" them. To see a narrative in terms of a list of facts or a series of events is only to invoke anew the idea of "someone" that is very much like the substance Locke referred to as a "we know not what". The notion of recursion doesn't appeal to such an agent or author, implying only a flowing back, a dynamic incompleteness that is at every moment paradoxically resolving.

8. Viewing both persons and death in narrative terms involves allowing that no one is completely dead so long as they are remembered, so long as they continue to figure in some story. However, this also suggests that the person--like suffering--is located in narrative, not in the 'natural' world. The body, then, is not a physical thing which we have or are associated with. Rather, the body is the complex, the folding together, of the

modalities of our conduct and relations with others. In Buddhist terms, it is fundamentally karmic. The body provides the basic 'grammar' of the improvised and always co-evolving narratives that constitute our persons.

9. The discussion below of Indian ideas on birth might be seen as a contradiction of this claim. The confusion arises because while the Indian may anticipate re-birth, it is not, in the sense used here, in fact their **personal** recurrence, the recurrence of the narrative of which they wholly consist. Rather, a new narrative occurs with which there is a karmic relation that is nearly always unexperienced--that is, untold. Meditative adepts may be able to "recall" their past lives, but that is really a matter of adopting a set of non-recursive narratives as a uniquely well-suited context for one's ongoing story. Karma sets the overall topology of experience, but it is not itself a narration.

10. What counts as "normal" in any given culture varies, of course, and infanticide has been widely practiced as a corrective to births which are either not "normal"--children born physically deformed--or not "ideal". That it has been more often than not been the case that the births of girl children have not been considered ideal--especially when there have been no prior male children born to a particular set of parents--tragically underscores the fact that it is the communal, culturally-directed story which is responsible for any given birth being seen as an unmitigated cause of celebration or not.

11. Shastri (1963) gives a very detailed account of both the ritual and metaphysical dimensions of Hindu ancestral rites in his Origin and Development of the Rituals of Ancestor Worship in India.

12. See, for example, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* V,10,5.

13. More confusing still is the existence in the *Puranas* of assertions that some *pitrs* are born directly from Brahman and were **never** humanly incarnated. (Shastri 1963:290 & 298)

14. See the *Maitri Upaniṣad* IV.1, 3-4, and especially the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* II.iv.5-14.

15. The disastrous nature of this fate is evidenced in the extent to which banishment was considered a capital sentence in classical Chinese culture. To be sent away from one's family and village was to be rendered in-human, to be stripped of one's personhood.

16. And if Hansen's arguments succeed, of Chinese culture generally.

17. As shall be argued later, this same ideal became incorporated as part of the fundamental practices of Ch'an.

18. For a contemporary working out of the consequences of seeing man in terms of between-ness, see especially the first chapter of Watsuji Tetsuro's Ethics. Watsuji's work is based on his analysis of the Japanese language, but many of his conclusions--seeing the problem of ethics as lying in the "betweenness between men", for example--apply equally well for Chinese culture.

19. It might be thought that a conflict exists between stressing the improvisational nature of learning and the spontaneity of personhood on one hand and the indispensability of

ritual or *li* on the other. In fact, no conflict exists at all. The *li* provide the ordered context without which action is not improvisational, but merely chaotic. The *li* do not dictate or determine behavior, but, to press a musical analogy, provide a mode or key within which each person's improvisations can be seen as meaningful.

20. Of course, insofar as a person is a recursively structured narrative--and not an "author" who freely fabricates this or that tale--the loss of personhood can only signify the final interruption of a life-story. In other words, suffering ends only with death. This seemed to have been the view of even some Indian Buddhists who maintained that full enlightenment came only with the death of the body.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 3

1. Joanna Macy has explored the compatibility of the Buddhist and systems-theoretical views of personhood in her recent book Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory (1991). Other texts of some interest are Laszlo's Introduction to Systems Philosophy (1972) and System, Structure and Experience (1969), Bateson's Steps To an Ecology of Mind (1972), and Maturana and Varela's The Tree of Knowledge (1987). While the systems view provides us with a useful theoretical framework for discussing the Buddhist approach to both personality and sociality, it is not fully satisfactory. Especially on practical or methodological grounds, its adoption of a descriptive regard is highly problematic since it presupposes an objectification of the system/subsystem relationship which effectively allows the latter to be seen as elements used in the composition of the former. The narrative view of personhood suggested in Chapter 1 and developed in more detail below is intended as a corrective for this shortcoming by disallowing an ontologically valid gap to be opened up between any of the various characters whose relations constitute who we, as persons, are in the process of becoming. That is, narrativity provides an opportunity to see the narrator or observer as in no way superordinate to the narrative as a whole and acts as an insurance against projecting into what we are studying--personhood--the principles of our 'self'-made relation to it.

2. While this representation of the relational structure of personhood stands as a pointed correction to the predispositions of the Buddha's Indian audiences, we might anticipate its psychological flavor to be less than fully satisfying in the context of Chinese culture with its explicitly communal understanding of relationality. The present appeal to conduct and not the psychophysical individual as the locus of our conversation is intended to fruitfully extend and dramatically narrativize the relational field of which persons are ostensibly focii.

3. Even so, the full answer to the question of what it means to be social will only emerge over the course of the dissertation as a whole. In particular, the following chapter in which a sustained discussion of Buddhist ontology will be mounted is indispensable in setting up the full context for a satisfactory response to the question of sociality. Determining what it is to be social is possible only after it has been decided what it is to "be" at all.

4. It has become a psychological commonplace that we do not live in a point-like present, but are spread out over a range of times--Bergson's (1960) heterogeneous time of concrete duration. But such a recognition that our mode of temporality is regional fails to exhaust the sense in which I would claim Buddhists necessarily regard the self as temporally indeterminate. At the very least, it is the case that who we are crucially depends on the constant revisioning not only of our current awareness and projects, but of all our past and future. Far from being inaccessible, our personal past and future are continually being told and re-told, revised and amended. Narrative time is not linear, but recursive--a fact not to be confused with either the theoretical reversibility of Newtonian time or Nietzsche's eternal recurrence and because of this, development or evolution always involves changing not just the 'present' and 'future', but the 'past' as well.

5. On the view that who we are depends on psychological and/or physiological continuity with the right kind of cause, see Part 3 of Derek Parfit's Reasons and Persons (1984).

6. Some systems-theorists, like Ervin Laszlo (1972), explicitly avow a monistic metaphysics, assuming that what is basic is not a world of matter or mind, but a universal "matrix" out of which all systems emerge. That this is undisguised foundationalism should be apparent, even if the matrix is left undefined. Laszlo remains dedicated to the existence of some apparently objective (that is, identifiable) reality prior to and independent of us as knowers. The foundation here--the originating matrix--may not be defined in any strict sense, but its existence is taken as inarguable: elsewise, how could any system have begun? Every system is built on some **precursor** and this defies the Buddha's insistence on a thorough eschewal of all imputed independence. If everything is dependently arisen, there can be no ultimate precursor or matrix. That this matrix is not 'matter' or 'spirit' no more excuses it from the charge of being a foundation than the ubiquity of land does of recognizing that it serves as the foundation for all our building. Laszlo's supposition of an originating matrix comes about as a result of adopting a descriptive regard with respect to the world/narration of which he is a unique characterization. In looking **at** and talking **about** the world it assumes the appearance of finitude and entitativeness and hence of being able to both act as a precursor and be itself surrounded by a void--that is, independent.

7. That (especially Ch'an) Buddhists are neither realists nor idealists in any strict sense of the words should become apparent in the following chapters.

8. It should be noted that just as it is a technological advance which allows us to directly counter the dictates of the ordinary experience of dawn and dusk, experiencing the non-separation of self and other is not accomplished by simple intellectual fiat, but only by developing and making systematic use of a particular technology. The fact that not all of us can manage this should no more count against the claims of mystics, shamans, and Ch'an masters than does the fact that only a handful of humans have traveled far enough away the earth to see it in its entirety.

9. Two points should be made here. First, it is crucial that we recognize that what we can control directly is, in the context of a karmically ordered world, less a function of power or capacity as of perception. That is, like it or not, our intentions transform the topology of our future experience. The fact that we typically don't see any direct connection between what we think about and yearn for and what actually comes about is a function of our imperceptiveness--ultimately of our identification with the temporally determinate nexus of the six senses. With the Buddha's acquisition of "paranormal" sense faculties, what is directly under control appears rather differently. We should also note that while the suggested "Copernican revolution of the self" entails that persons cannot ultimately be identified with any particular stream of consciousness or suitably connected series of bodily states, it does not deny that our experience is typically private. What is claimed is simply that this privacy has the same value as any other common experience which admits of exceptions. The Buddha and many others have claimed to have brought about through meditative discipline a loss of the usual boundaries to the ego or self and the usually concomitant identification with the stream of consciousness or the body. Those of us who have experienced 'telepathic' communication, who have had our thoughts "read" by others or who have had a stranger ask us only for the date and time of our birth and then tell us in minute detail what happened on a particular day now five years in the past can have no doubt that it is possible for the privacy of the inward aspects of the self to be opened up to access by "others." A de-centered view of the person allows these exceptions to be seen as rational, even if exceedingly rare--something the standard view cannot admit.

10. There is a recognition in the Western psychological tradition that the self is, in fact, a multiplicity and not a unity. James, Freud, Jung, and Hillman (to name a few) have all claimed that the self is a community of selves. However, this has been understood as meaning either that there are many masks or personas we don from time to time, or that we are--as Gurdjieff and Ouspensky put it--a collection of small 'i's without any dominant 'I' in charge of directing the drama of our life. In each case, it is assumed that we are identifiable with a single actor or at least a single life. To this extent, the psychological assertion of the multiplicity of the self still falls prey to centrist thinking. It is "I" who am many. The narrative view offered here accepts this form of multiplicity and yet goes well beyond it. My mother, my father, my siblings, friends, rivals and enemies are all given as "me," as my person. This is **not** to say that they are "imaginary" or mere "projections." The solipsistic move is that of centrism taken to its logical extreme. Rather, it is simply the case that as narration we include, interpenetrate, literally incorporate one another.

11. As defined below, this amounts to a denial of sociality. Indeed, taken to its logical extreme, the effort to control others inevitably precipitates one or another form of pathologically consistent mis-conduct--the literal deformation of interpersonality.

12. Thus, no one we meet is our partner in mere accident. The people or encounters may surprise us, may seem unexpected, but we belong together. Maturity is knowing exactly what this belonging to one another means.

13. That is, if we had intended things differently, we would have been born at some other time or place than we have been, on some other planet perhaps, in some other form. That we are in **this** world, with **this** 'objective' history, **these** heroes and villains is a function of our own story-in-telling. To turn Heidegger's terminology around, it is not that our historicity evidences our throwness, that we have been thrown into a fundamentally foreign existence, but rather that we have caught ourselves in this narrative net and not some other.

14. It should be noted that Mead's analysis of the emergence of the self and of mind as a function of social acts entails our responding to an other seen as being like ourselves. Thus, the social act itself apparently presumes a prior distinction of self and other and Mead's derivation of the self from the social act appears to be inescapably and perhaps viciously circular. This, I believe, is a consequence of his using conversation--and not narratives--as the primary social act giving rise to persons since such a choice amounts to carrying out an unjustified abstraction by means of which it is possible to posit the presence of a listener and speaker as not only necessary for the occurrence of sociality, but sufficient as well. As will be indirectly argued in the following chapter, this sort of reduction is inconsistent with a fully narrative mode of inquiry. The appeal to the family, not the dyad, as the basic social unit *ala* Durkheim fares no better. It is still an abstraction which never occurs naturally.

15. In order to forestall any supposition that this will land us in some form of crude, Watsonian behaviorism, I should remark that as defined, conduct comprises not only those activities carried out by what could be referred to as the "motor system," but activities which are cognitive and affective as well. That is, thinking, feeling, emoting, wishing and intending are all dimensions of conduct in the sense of being dynamic orientations of an ongoing narrative.

16. As the sense in which I use the term "communication" departs from the standard in significant ways, the reader is referred to Chapter 5 where a consistently Buddhist theory of communication is sketched out.

17. This is especially clear for Durkheim who defines social facts as ways of thinking and acting external to the individual and endowed with a power of coercion by means of which they control him. To be social for Durkheim is to be rational as opposed to personal/egotistical, to be universal as opposed to individual, to develop institutions which regulate our behavior at least in part by having us see one another not as unique persons but as members of a given collective. In all these senses, Durkheim's use of the term "social" more closely approximates what I have here referred to as the societal.

18. Granted the distinction of these two orientations, a society can be seen as the site of the (variable) interpenetration of the social and the societal, and its overall character or flavor as a function of the relative balance of these orientations among those dwelling in its midst.

19. In systems-theoretical terms, this increased vulnerability is a function of attaining progressively improbable and hence complex and difficult to maintain forms of order. Simple systems are less open to challenge, requiring much greater influxes of energy to be threatened with disruption, but at the same time are less capable of responding to crises that do arise because their internal organization is too restrictive. Thus, for any viable system, vulnerability and flexibility must increase in direct proportion. See Prigogine (1980).

20. In this light, the problem with Bourdieu's solution is perhaps thrown into greater focus. Insofar as he defines improvisation in terms of our strategic employment of "durably installed generative principle(s)"--the habitus--which derive from "the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment", our practices tend to reproduce the regularities immanent within the objective conditions currently prevailing. That is, necessity is made a virtue and improvisation is in fact a societal and not fully social act. Thus, Bourdieu insists that our practices amount to neither the "creation of unpredictable novelty [nor] a simple mechanical reproduction of the initial conditionings". (See Bourdieu, 1977, pp.72-78,95)

21. This raises interesting questions about the diverse merits of various moral systems. Arguably, a moral system based on fixed principles (Kantian deontology) or on a calculation of universally construed goods and ills (classical utilitarianism) will tend to bring about an inability to respond creatively to novel crises and hence to perpetuate suffering. A moral system which eschews all rules and principles will then maximally prepare us to resolve crises and end suffering, but will also leave us increasingly vulnerable to new incidents. In Ch'an, this is not seen as particularly problematic since suffering is the necessary impetus for the integrative practices of emptiness, responsibility and readiness. More on this in Chapter 7.

22. The term "same" is not wholly satisfactory as it implies the possibility of a surrounding difference. The logic of narration is not, as we shall see in the following chapter, based on the reality or objectivity of identity and difference. As characters in a shared narrative, we are neither identical (after all we have apparently disparate bodies) nor different. The narrative **as a whole** is who we are and it is into this **we** that our characters are taken up, in which 'you' and 'I' first appear.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 4

1. For reasons which will become evident over the course of this and the following chapter, harmony is not--especially given the Confucian and Taoist backdrop against which Ch'an emerged--to be understood as reaching an **agreement** with others. That is, harmony is not a matter of matching, of achieving a (propositionally mediated) identity, but of complementing or mutual completion. It is, in this sense, rather like the concept of harmony in music. A chord is a higher order phenomenon, with unique emotional and formal qualities not found in any of its notes individually. The notes cannot be identical for harmony to arise. To the contrary, the individual notes must instead remain distinct even while bound together in the higher order system of the chord. And yet, this distinctness is not by any means absolute insofar as **in the context of the chord**, each note sounds differently than it does played by itself. The note itself is transformed while entering into the harmony. Thus, an F# added to an Eminor chord sounds very different from "an identical" F# added to a Cmajor chord.

2. It should be noted that "process ontology" does **not** escape this ghost. Processes are held to be both determinate--taking place in this locale over this span of time--and objective.

3. Deterministic ontology refers to either objective realism or subjective idealism. In both cases identity and difference are assumed to be real and not projective or artificial in nature.

4. Thus, while there is in Buddhism a marked absence of any agent who created the world, there is a profound emphasis on orientation or value which appears in the early tradition as karma, in the Pure Land tradition as vows, in the Vajrayana as motive, and in Ch'an as readiness. That is, the role which we have been wont to assign to agency in the context of a deterministic ontology is in Buddhism played out by orientation. Thus, improvisation is not necessarily something initiated and carried out by an individual within some relatively well-defined circumstances. Instead, it is seen as a qualitatively unique 'form' of conduct from which one or more 'agents' can be abstracted. In actuality, improvisation is always the endeavoring of an ensemble.

5. The reader may well want to ask at this point why one mode is historically preferred? Is it not because it's more workable? If the calculative approach is dominant, doesn't this indicate--as Darwin might argue--that it is simply because it is superior? better adapted to the time and circumstances? While Darwinianism is arguably deficient as a model of evolution, I have no quarrel with its application in this particular instance. As stated earlier, we tend toward the societal, toward a calculative orientation in inquiry, because it requires less energy than establishing and maintaining fully social relations. From a Marxist point of view, true individuality and community come only with relative freedom from the requirements of mere survival, and I would whole-heartedly agree. Sociality and a consistently traveled narrative path toward understanding can only be achieved when persons are relatively free of external constraint. However, this freedom need not be won by way of industrialization as Marx seems to have supposed. In fact, if Ivan Illich's (1971 and 1973) analyses are granted credibility, there is good reason to believe that industrialized societies fare far worse than subsistence societies in provided persons with the time and energy requisite for narrative conduct.

6. It is only with a presumption of linearity as a metaphysically grounded feature of experience that the notion of a cause as an interruption can make clear sense. Earlier, suffering was defined as an interruption of our life-narrative, a claim which suggests that suffering is in part a result of mis-identifying time and growth as linear processes. This, I would posit, results from the centrist identification of the self with the point-moment of the 'I am', the conviction that 'I' am temporally and spatially determinate. Deutsch's (1989, unpublished) otherwise interesting proposals *vis-à-vis* understanding causality are beset by just such a problematic core--history is rendered a seriality and not a complexity, an incalculable and often recursively structured twisted togetherness. If the world were truly Newtonian in essence, then in the absence of a new force, there would be no alteration of the direction along which things are moving/developing. In Deutsch's terminology, unless interrupted, the normality of a thing will simply continue to be realized. This "inertial" model of change, however, can apply only in ideally static worlds, especially worlds wherein time is reversible (as in Newtonian mechanics) or transcendable (as in much of Indian metaphysics), and wherein location is fundamentally generic (as in a system of Cartesian co-ordinates). Quite opposed to this, for example, is a Buddhist view according to which inertia and sameness are possible only given systemic, feedback-modulated maintenance of a line of development. Contrary to the Newtonian model, a constant direction or velocity of motion or change is possible only when there is an expenditure of energy. Otherwise, the 'natural' tendency of things, their normality, is always a slide toward increased randomness; that is, toward maximal entropy or disorder. As we shall see, one of the ramifications of this in the moral sphere is that truly moral acts cannot be plausibly thought to simply follow from a seminal adoption a set of true principles. Nor can peace, purity or enlightenment be presumed to persist without effort and continued practice.

7. Habermas' (1987) critique of the managerial mentality and its claim to efficacy is pertinent here. Also note the structural similarity of calculative reduction and the pathological potential of a desire to control others mentioned in note #10 of Chapter 3 and the passage to which it refers.

8. This state of affairs is what Prigogine (1980) refers to as being far from equilibrium or maximal entropy. In a word, it is a state of creative improbability.

9. As was intimated in Chapter 2, it would appear that Indian culture was largely calculative in orientation--biased toward certainty, finality, and individuality/universality--while Chinese culture was traditionally much more narrative.

10. Hence the impossibility of conceiving a thorough realism.

11. The excessive vehemence with which so many of us are initially inclined to contest Ch'an's stance on thinking is itself rather suspicious, being reminiscent of the angry denials of an alcoholic that his or her drinking is any kind of problem. Just as alcohol solves one problem or complex of problems for the addicted drinker while spawning a host of others to which the drinker is effectively blinded, calculations and habitual thinking certainly prove their effectiveness in correcting certain ills. What is not so obvious are the "side-effects", the biasing of our conduct toward societality and the consequent sequestering of our 'selves' behind a deceptively impervious network of 'facts', 'principles', and 'necessities'.

12. The specter of pernicious relativism and its presumed catalization of solipsism or metaphysical selfishness is itself a projection of a negative value possible only with the framework of a calculative mindset. It is based on thinking of our interlocutor, whom we accuse of relativism, as an 'individual', someone radically apart from us, without the connectedness needed to reach a consensual accounting and prospectus. But such individuals are not real. The radical relativist is, in this sense, an alter ego of the supremely rational man dedicated to universal agreement. They are, in fact, symbiotically related.

13. Shortly, the problem of production will be addressed directly. At this juncture is it enough to realize that this test is predicated on the intelligibility of "production" and that there is good reason to believe the notion is subject to the same criticisms that led the Western tradition to abandon the association of causation and force or power.

14. I should note that Hansen (1981) sees the introduction of skepticism into the Chinese philosophical tradition as being concurrent with the importation of the Indian Buddhist doctrine of mind-only. As I will argue in Chapter 6, Ch'an appropriates this doctrine in such a way that its primary thrust is not epistemic, but moral/evaluative, and that it there does not give rise to skepticism at all. To the contrary, it becomes pivotal in establishing the sureness of one's interrelatedness with others.

15. This claim may seem to be at odds with the assertion in early Buddhism that a saint is one who has laid aside his/her burden (*ohitabhara*). As I read this assertion, however, what the saint enjoys is the absence of all hindrance, of all that restricts his or her free response to the ever-changing opportunities for contribution offered by the world. In a term that will be crucial in understanding the sociality of Ch'an practice and enlightenment, the saint is in this sense a person who evidences unlimited virtuosity. Playing with the phraseology of the Heart Sutra, we can say that for such a person, burdens are truly no-'burden'.

16. Here we may take MacIntyre's (1981:177ff) discussion of practice as adequate for our purpose though he does not speak of knowledge as a virtue and takes practices in what I would be inclined to argue is an unwarrantedly narrow sense.

17. In this sense, the knowledge and virtue can be thought of as covering much the same conceptual ground as the Buddhist terms *prajñā* and *pāramitā*.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. The English "utter", like the Sanskrit *"uttara"*, comes from the root *ut* or 'out'. To utter something is to push it out, and an utterance is literally a 'speaking out'. But this speaking out not only expresses the idea or thought which we have, it marks off we who are speaking from both the sentences we speak and those who are listening. Utterance is the creation of subject and object.

2. Mead's (1934) contrast between the 'I' and the 'me' is useful here. We normally identify ourselves and others in terms of the 'me', the commonly held set of attitudes in consonance with which we tend to act in our encounters with others. Like Bourdieu's habitus, the 'me' is not a source of improvisation, but rather the ground against which improvisation may come to figure. And yet, in actually responding to another it is always possible for us to not react on the basis of the internalized attitudes of generic others--that is on the basis of what we know as our 'selves'--but to respond as an 'I'. For Mead, this means responding from a deep source of ineradicable unpredictability. As an 'I', we can never have a guarantee of how we shall respond. We surprise even ourselves.

3. In the Indian tradition, the relationship between *māyā* (or illusion) and suffering was typically taken to be a function of our wrongly supposing that change and transformation are ultimately real, that the unexpected was in some sense ontologically grounded. In other words, suffering was taken to result from erroneously mis-identifying ourselves with the relative and changing phenomenon of mundane experience, from taking mere appearance to be reality. And so it is no surprise that when Arjuna expresses his doubts about entering a battle with his kinsmen, Krsna points out that no one is really slain or slays since what really exists is eternal and immutable (BG II.19-20). In our own, scientific tradition, very much the same sort of considerations obtain. What is real is what underlies all of our historically embedded attempts at describing it, whether this is seen in terms of a set of Platonic Ideas, of the smallest identified particles of matter, of the space-time field itself, or of the mathematically-formulated laws of nature. In all such cases, the unexpected is ideally understood to be a stimulus for initiating what Thomas Kuhn (1970) has referred to as a revolutionary shift in the paradigms according to which we pursue and formulate our knowledge of the world. As Pierce would have it, given time and resources in sufficient quantity, there is no reason why we shouldn't eventually arrive at a point of complete knowledge. In sharing this dream, Western science and Indian mysticism reveal their common roots in what I have termed calculation.

4. It is often supposed that the independent existence of the world can be warranted on the basis of our increasing success in being able to control or at least predict world events. If it were not the case that our concepts "cut the world at its joints", and that our laws accurately describe the material patterns of all temporality, how else could this increased success be explained? From a Buddhist point of view, however, the inference does not necessarily follow. If the world is ordered karmically, our continued pursuit of a particular line of inquiry aimed at realizing greater control over nature will eventually bring about situations where such control is possible. It is not that we are more and more closely approximating the real world, but that we are creating a world which is more and more like what we intend. The evidence available to us does not allow us to decide between the scientific and the karmic view. As competing theories, they 'explain' the data equally well.

5. Practical implications of this are, of course, not hard to find. The advertising world, political campaigns, education systems and so on are all based on the power of commonly shared distinctions to transform not only the speech, but the thought, feeling and actions of a community. It is, in fact, arguable that any mass-media unavoidably acts as a vehicle of propaganda. Where the news media in a "free" country like the United States and the information ministries in totalitarian states like Nazi Germany differ is not in their methods, but in the consistency of their ideological stances. But surely, whether a country is indoctrinated en masse or along two or three main ideological lines makes little difference. As Nietzsche's genealogy of morals makes quite evident, changing the patterns of speech in a given community will, over time, deeply effect everyone living in that community.

6. Of course, the very fact that language allows communication by first reducing us to individuals who are like one another--who have substantially the same set of relevances or horizons of projected value and who therefore live in a substantially shared and apparently objective world--makes it possible for language to divide as well as unite a population. The development of aristocratic dialects, of creoles, of masculine and feminine forms of speech, all indicate the extent to which we can use the abstractive aspect of calculation to set ourselves apart from and above (or below) some other individual or group of individuals.

7. Given this, it should be no surprise that the first step taken in trying to destroy and not merely subjugate a people is the forced extinction of their language, of their shared world.

8. There is, as anyone who has studied management dynamics well understands, a limit to this efficiency. As the number of conventions operating in any given organization or community increases, there is a tendency for the movement of ideas and decisions to slow, much as if conventions added a kind of societal mass which increases the gravitational forces keeping the organization together--thereby encouraging contact and constant proximity--but which also serves to constrain the free play of any individual's creativity.

9. It should also be noted that not only does calculative communication depend on a common medium, but on the presence of substantially similar relationships to and uses of that medium. Where this is not the case, error or mis-interpretation necessarily results. Thus, agreement about the meaning of terms used in discourse is of paramount importance and is typically the first step taken in overcoming apparent cases of mis-understanding. Standard speech is crucial whenever communication is calculatively construed.

It should also be stressed that the standardization of speech is a primary condition in the standardization of vast ranges of conduct--in education, in politics, in scientific research, even in courting a lover. Meaning comes to be something we take as an object of inquiry, not the natural unfolding of our narratives. It becomes a content, something contained.

10. That we summarize a novel like Joyce's Ulysses or Lessing's Shikasta is indication only of our unwillingness or incapacity for walking through the doors they open, the worlds they intimate. It is not the novels themselves which are complete and monothetically graspable, but 'we' who refuse what they invite.

11. The following chapter will discuss at some length independent precedents in the Buddhist tradition for seeing meaning as practice or response.

12. Thus, in Confucian China where music was considered to be one of the six arts indispensable in personal cultivation and the attainment of sageliness, music is said to begin with playing in unison with others and then going on to improvise. To merely play by rote, to express only what has been prescribed is to reduce the musician to a mere technician. Becoming a sage requires the ability to readily respond in situations which are completely open ended, to spontaneously conduct oneself with authority and virtue. For two brief, but clear philosophical discussions of music in the Confucian tradition, see Tu (1985:98-99) and Hall and Ames (1987:275-283).

13. This is not to deny that information can be transferred, even in the context of narrative communication. It must be born in mind that narration is not a thing or act as such, but an orientation, a way of inquiring. Thus, a transfer of information may occur, but it will not form the aim or orient of the communicative process, being seen instead as a means or 'fact' about that process, and never a value or end in itself. To see a transfer between individuals is, in a word, a function of the projection of horizons segregating communicator, communicant and message. By analogy, reducing communication to transmitting some information or (calculative) knowledge would be like reducing the performance of a guitar solo to fretting strings with one hand while using the other to pluck them. No matter how precise this description became--for example, a note-for-note transcription with parallel acoustic analysis of the tones produced--it would not capture the meaning of the solo.

14. This suspension of identity and difference manifests also on the structural level of music since no tone--say an F#--has a definite musical nature of its own, but becomes a meaningful note only in the context of various chords, modes, melodies and so on. The F# heard in a Gmajor chord is not identical to that heard in Cmajor7flat5 chord.

Some might want to contend that the F# can be defined precisely in terms of its frequency. But pure tones (which, it might be added, occur only electronically) are notoriously unmusical. The musicality of any tone is a function of the harmonics surrounding the central frequency--the timbre arising from the tone being played on different instruments. Thus, composing on a guitar or a grand piano are quite distinct experiences and the music one plays differs accordingly.

15. It is because composed music institutes an asymmetrical power relation between the composer and audience that music can be used to manipulate crowds, to instill military fervor, and so on. I am not, of course, saying that all composed music must manipulate or coerce, but only that the danger exists because it fosters a one-way relation of producer and consumer. It is possible, however, for a performer to open up to the way in which the audience is hearing and to adjust his or her playing accordingly, to change the tempo, the dynamics or the 'feel' of the piece in ways which leave the composer's musical structure fully intact but which allow the audience to indirectly have a measure of control over their own musical experience.

16. In actuality, few conversations are so clearly cut into speakers and listeners. We tend to butt in on one another, finish each other's sentences, truncate one line of thought because it's already been grasped and switch to another without pause. We even talk at the same time. The disjointedness of typical letters and school term papers is not so much a reflection of a poorly structured mind as of the disparity of spoken and written

conversation. In spoken conversation, our thoughts are often completed by and through others--an indication of the social core around which we typically find a more or less extensive girdling of societal conventions.

17. It must be mentioned that in actual and not merely ideal conversations, there is typically a great deal of overlapping and interruption. Sentences go unfinished--that is remain without any clear semantic content --are completed by others, or change direction in mid-stream forming a grammatical bastard which nevertheless may figure brilliantly in the conversational context. Not infrequently at least in certain cultures, many people talk at once and often with an increase in the feeling that things are being better understood by everyone involved. What this suggests is that discourse can be deconstructed and used narratively to bring about concourse. This is obvious in poetry, for instance, but everyday conversations are often poetic in the relevant sense of being polythetic structures the meaning of which cannot be reduced to a monothetically apprehended atom. As might have been expected, then, discourse is an ideal--a value--and not some thing or being independently existing in communal space.

18. As such a people, we are an aggregate of Durkheimian individuals whose conduct is fundamentally compelled by society, by the institutions which he refers to as "social facts". Note that while the Buddhist view of persons can admit these same 'facts' into the constitution of our personality, they are not granted 'causal' status, but remain interdependent with the non-collective aspects of our narration/world.

19. Hence the Buddha's oft repeated warning that even though a bodhisattva saves innumerable beings, he or she must not direct their attention at any such beings. Doing so not only objectifies others, but creates a virtual center or 'self' from which help is then thought to proceed. Enlightenment remains a mere goal.

20. For an extended treatment of intimacy as used herein, see Chapter 7.

21. It is imperative that it be stressed, however, that ending suffering is not the extinction of change or challenge, but rather their creative incorporation into the ongoing improvisation of our life-narrative. Given this, enlightenment cannot be an achieved state--hence the <u>Heart Sutra's</u> insistence that there is "no attainment and nothing to attain"--but must be seen as the way we respond, the quality of our improvised concourse with 'others'.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. Since as persons we are not an individual living in the world, but are rather a world in its entirety, saying that meaning is what we are doing is not to subjectify meaning in a radical sense, but to explode the subjective/objective dichotomy. As a person, what I am doing is not limited to what the ego intends or any one body carries out. It is all of what is happening in my world. That is, the meaning of the Buddha's remarks to Kisagotami include not only this dissertation, but the new manner in which I relate with my son, the vigor I bring to my daily meditation and so on ad infinitum.

2. There is a sense in which a Buddhist hermeneutics will not go along with this dismissal of intent, especially in the case that intention is not limited to an activity of the 'self', but is seen as a creativity exercised by the whole person. Moreover, as is well-known, it is not action that establishes our karma, but rather our intentional conduct. Insofar, then, as our karma sets the texture of our experience, providing the context for our improvisations, there is a quite real sense in which our intentions do condition meaning. What the Buddhist hermeneuticist cannot do is to understand intentions solely as a function of egoic individuality, especially since the 'place' of intention is not inner or psychological, but the ongoingness of conduct as such.

3. In the following chapter, we will undertake an extensive discussion of the nature of practice in the Ch'an tradition. In brief, the term "practice" refers to the on-going process of realizing our Buddha-nature. This includes but cannot be reduced to the use of various spiritual disciplines or techniques like chanting, bowing, the recitation of mantras, mindfulness, concentration and so on. Thus, in Ch'an it is claimed in the teaching of non-cultivation that one practices in all situations, whether standing, sitting, lying down or walking.

4. I have adopted the standard translation here for the Sanskrit word *samma* which qualifies each of the eight limbs of the Path. However, *samma* does not connote something that is "right" or "correct" in distinction from something that is "wrong" or "incorrect". Instead, it refers to what is complete or whole and suggests integrativeness rather than distinctness.

5. All translations of the *MK* are taken from David Kalupahana's (1986) excellent translation of and commentary on Nagarjuna's text.

6. Since the presupposition of discourse is that language is basically propositional and not inventive, these distinctions and the way of life resulting from them are typically assumed to in some sense represent the way things really are. That is, we presume that our language reflects **the** real world and that even if our conduct is regulated in conformity with the invention of new (and what we almost invariably take to be better) mirrors, this is all for the best. We are simply getting closer to being able to adequately and accurately describe what is. That this is unacceptable in a world where value precedes being and where permanence is always horizonal in nature should by this point be clear. And yet, such new inventions are not inherently "bad" as long as we remain aware of the fact that they do not represent reality but rather help to define it, establishing what we **can** do and what we **cannot** in the face of any given crisis or suffering.

7. A reasonably close analog in Western philosophy for this manner of conceiving meaning, understanding and knowledge can be found in the work of G.H. Mead. For

instance, in his Philosophy of the Present, Mead claims that "knowledge is not...to be identified with the presence of content in experience. There is no conscious attitude that is as such cognitive. Knowledge is a process in conduct..." (1932:68) In Mind, Self and Society, he directly addresses the problem of meaning and like Ma-tzu insists that, "Meaning is...a development of something objectively there as a relation between certain phases of the social act; it is not a psychical addition to that act and it is not an "idea" as traditionally conceived..." (1934:76) Meaning is, for Mead, an "adjustive response" fully present in social conduct.

8. Interestingly, it is never mathematics--the science which above all affords incontrovertible answers on which all must agree--which is the basis of the training of a sage, but music, an art which in Confucian China began with conventionally determined modal and melodic structures and, as the piece developed, moved into complete improvisation.

9. I would argue that this watershed occurred less for philosophical reasons than political and economic ones. Given the method of arriving at public policy decisions in Athens at the time of Socrates and Plato, the ability to appeal to fixed standards according to which truth could be evaluated would have had tremendous appeal. Once a few principles of choice had been established, a great deal of debate could be dispensed with. Not only would this be efficient in the way that all societally organized processes tend to be, it would tend to encourage identification with the state rather than with persons of particularly strong or authoritative character. Once absolute standards of choice have been established, rather than seeing oneself as a unique contributor to the political process, the natural tendency is to see oneself as a 'citizen' among other citizens, to see one's allegiance as being primarily to the state which--to use Socrates' metaphor--is one's true parent. Where conflict with other city-states is rampant, such an identification is not only expedient but arguably indispensable for survival.

10. Even a writer as typically critical of the positions taken within the hermeneutical mainstream as Derrida does not depart significantly on this point. Indeed, his "Signature Event Context" (1982:309-30) not only takes communication as a kind of transferalin a linguistic context the transmission of meaning as semantic content--but implies that it is subordinate to writing. Writing includes and is in some sense prior to communicating as the transfer of meaning.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. This is a reference, of course, to the account of Ma-tsu's enlightenment. One day, Master Jang called through the window of Ma-tsu's hut and asked what he planned on with sitting in meditation. Ma-tsu replied that he intended to become a Buddha. Jang retorted by picking up a clay roofing tile and scraping it against the stone walk in front of Ma-tsu's hermitage. Irritated by the sound, Ma-tsu came out and asked what he was doing. "Polishing this tile to make a mirror," he replied. Objecting that this would never work, Ma-tsu was about to return to his meditation when Jang agreed and suggested the same held for his student's ambitious intentions, informing him that ch'an is not a matter of sitting or reclining and that becoming a Buddha has nothing to do with any fixed form. In fact, sitting as a Buddha is killing Buddha and holding on to the form of sitting ch'an is to entirely forfeit its profound principle.

2. The philosophical problem of 'other minds' thus came to prominence only with the skepticism that goes along with a distrust of the senses based on the independence of mind and its natural objects. That is, 'other minds' are taken to be of doubtful ontological status only when they are taken to exist in a world which is itself understood to exist apart from us as its knowers and which we can only access through the intervening media of experience--this latter being neither part of us or the world, but something different from and yet uncertainly linking them.

3. From which it should be concluded that Buddhists simply don't buy into the Cartesian inference of "I am" from the mere presence of thinking/experience. Rather, they would insist that the only inference to be drawn from Descartes' doubtful reflections is that there is doubting going on. Now, as understood by Buddhists, this is not to say that all that remains is behaviorthe track taken by certain strands of the European philosophical tradition. Instead of this "nihilist" position, the Buddha recommended that we turn our attention to the cause of experience (whether doubt or anything else). That is, we are referred away from experience itself to the value coordinated development of relationships known as karma. What remains basic is again the narrative level of human interaction and not a purely objective behavioral tableau.

4. It is in such a light that the Buddhist must find fault with Habermas' depiction of communication as involving one person who makes claims and another who must say either "yes" or "no" in response.

5. Importantly, while the Buddha's claim that he does not take a stand on either 'is' or 'is-not' (*sat* or *asat*) can be seen as a purely objective matter of choice leaving him the chooser unaffected in any direct way, the Chinese term typically translated as "is" or "being" (*yu*) has the primary connotation of 'having'. To eschew 'is' and 'is-not' for the Chinese Buddhist is also to eschew 'having' and 'not-having', even when these refer to the experience of enlightenment.

6. Hence the numerous references in the literature of Ch'an to the danger of meditation sickness (*ting ping*).

7. It must be stressed that "self-consciousness" implies here both the awkward sense of being "on stage" as well as the so-called "normal" awareness of ourselves as individuals occupying a particular place in some "social" situation. The former mode of self-consciousness clearly limits effective relationship with others while it may be that

the latter is a kind of prerequisite of successful societal interaction. For the Buddhist, however, the adoption of a place in the scheme of things is indicative of identifying one's self as a subject which could be here or there. Not only does this lead to a tendency to get caught in thinking about where 'I' ought to be or want to be instead of being wholly involved in responding with others, it reinforces the self-ish propensity to act calculatively since someone else could as well be in my shoes as I could in theirs. Becoming interchangeable, 'we' become generic.

8. Thus, in speaking English it is quite permissible to say that my hands know how to type, it goes without saying that this doesn't mean that my hands know that they are now typing the word "enlightenment". Knowing how doesn't imply a subject of knowledge. At the same time, if we catch the tail end of a remark the last words of which are "...knows that", we fully expect there to be a someone--even an anyone--who has undergone the relevant experience. Interestingly, in the same way that the Chinese did not explicitly distinguish knowing how and knowing that, their question words are notoriously open from our perspective. The single word *ho*[B], for instance, covers the same ground as our questions "what?", "how?", "why?" and "which?" (but, significantly, not "who?"), indicating a tendency not to discriminate between what is happening, its meaning, and the manner in which it is appropriately engaged. Whereas we break apart present fact (what), the causal and telic bases of fact, and the way in which facts are either arrived at or handled, the Chinese made no such hard distinctions--all of which suggests a blurring of what we refer to as the difference between subject and object, knower and known.

9. Indeed, the relationship between *li* and the person as body (*t'i*) was considered close enough by Chinese lexicographers for them to use *t'i* to define *li*. Notably, of all the common characters in the Chinese language, only two share the *li*[A] phonetic, "ritual vase"--ritual action (*li*) and bodily self (*t'i*). The interested reader is referred to Boodberg (PEW 2, pp. 317-32) and Hall and Ames (1987, p.87ff).

10. Pai-chang goes on to define offering (*pu shih*[A], literally expansive giving, a giving which brings about connection or relationship) as eschewing duality--refraining from the projection of any horizons. (see HTC 119.422a)

11. The ease with which the Chinese appropriated this notion is perhaps due to the overwhelming predominance of so-called "mass nouns" in the Chinese language. Unlike the nouns with which the speakers of the Indo-European languages are most familiar, Chinese nouns do not typically signify individual things or even abstract entities, but instead refer to common patterns in the configuration of natural energy--that is, recurring constellations of dispositions to behave in certain ways. Thus, *erh* and *yueh* ("sun" and "moon") do not refer to things as much as they do to regular patterns of activity--including our own. Moon is indistinguishable not only from seeing at night, but from the predatorial habits of nocturnal animals and the confession of new love. And so, where we and the speaker of Sanskrit take "person" to be a singular object of inquiry and "persons" as a plural object, the Chinese word *jen*[A] acts much more like our words "water" or "flour." Pluralizing--the enforcement of a distinction of one and many--seems awkward if not outright inappropriate.

12. *Shou*, rendered here as "select", involves both what we refer to as receptive and active modes of conduct, embracing both sensation and the rudimentary judgment of what is sensed in terms of like, dislike, and neutrality. Suggesting that we not select

what comes our way is on the one hand to recommend that we not fight our karma, but it is also to insist that we not limit what comes in any sense--that is, that we eschew the projection of any horizons marking off what 'is' and what 'is-not'. Attaining this point is cutting off the 84,000 conditions, realizing our original nature.

13. Hence the astute remark of the spiritual maverick, G.I.Gurjieff, who insisted that the last thing any of us are willing to give up is our suffering.

14. This claim may leave the reader feeling most uncomfortable if not on the verge of rational outrage. The notion that our problems will be ultimately dissolved only when we leave off trying to solve them is an affront to the kind of self-reliance that has been the canon of freedom and responsibility at least since the European Renaissance. The claim is not meant to deny that we can intentionally reap the 'goods' we seek, at least some of the time. But it is meant to deny that this will lead to liberation in the Ch'an Buddhist sense of the word. Ch'an masters are quite willing to admit that it is possible to cultivate merit--to make "good karma"--and to thus insure at least initially happy circumstances for our selves in the future. They insist, however, that such merit-oriented action binds us no less securely than do the sufferings we undergo. Hence the injunction to cut off the very distinction of 'good' and 'evil'.

15. In fact, the graph for *ting* entails *p'i* (foot) and has the sense of walking, of embodied movement--a movement which for the Chinese is seen as a social/relational event and not a fundamentally private undertaking. It is always done in context, in community.

16. In this light it is interesting that one of the classics of the later Ch'an tradition is the (apocryphal) text attributed to Asvaghosha entitled *ta-ch'eng-ch'i-hsin*[A]*-lun* or The Mahayana Raising of Faith since the Chinese term for faith (*hsin*[A]) does not entail a belief in some doctrine, person, or deity, but what we would refer to as confidence. *Hsin*[A] is being not just true to one's word (as implied in the character's union of *jen*[A] (person) and *yan* (word)), but unswerving in one's conduct. Being confident is acting without hesitation and, when that confidence is well founded, with absolute assurance of the sort that comes only with excellence.

17. The most notable and commonly referred to use of mirrors in Chinese Buddhism is arguably Hua-yen Master Fa-tsang's metaphor of the net of Indra where each crossing point of the threads of the net is a mirror reflecting all the other mirrors. That is, each thing, no matter how small or humble, contains and is contained by all other things and the differentiations we create reflect not the true nature of the world, but our own values, our own biases.

18. Recall here the above remarks about the co-implication of having and being in the Chinese term *yu*. Once we cease taking ourselves to be self-identical individuals and realize that we are without either set location or substantial ground, we can no longer think of having things, even personality traits. We come to enjoy the particulars of our life-story--of our character and the dispositions according to which we typically respond to challenge--in much the same way as we do the green of springtime grass and the opalescent quality of an autumnal sunrise.

19. And perhaps as well for the Japanese, regarding which, see Tom Kasulis on intimacy. (PEW 40:4, October 1990)

20. To allay the concern that Ch'an recommends a kind of free-for-all existence, it should be mentioned that the teachings of the Mahayana all involve not making a value judgment which separates samsara (bondage) and nirvana (liberation). That is, there is not only no 'one' to be bound, but no 'thing' which can bind us. The 'facts' of our situation are never as important as how we respond in it. Once we cease identifying ourselves as things apart from the rest of our worlds, calling a situation 'good' or 'bad' is beside the point. All things are part of who we are, part of our great body, and as such are no more in need of being dealt with or replaced or cut off than are the shapes of our noses. Beautiful and ugly noses both serve the same purpose of connecting us with parts of ourselves--flowers, foods, the scent of our lover--that would be absent otherwise. The kind of nose we have--the kind of self or karma we have--is less important than how we use it.

21. Hence Nagarjuna's explicit warning to not take emptiness as something to rely on, a kind of transcendent reality opposed to the mundane sphere of worldly existence.

22. This way of thinking reached its apogee in the Hua-yen School--a school which did for Chinese Buddhist theory what Ch'an did for practice.

23. See, for example, T 2012.380b, 381a, 381c.

24. In Confucian thought, the impropriety of standing out is only partly a function of it offending our sense of humility. More importantly, it would seem to conflict with the natural flow of virtue, a flow which effects harmony without any apparent medium or application of force. Thus, "the rule of virtue can be compared to the Pole Star which commands the homage of the multitude of stars without leaving its place" (A II.1), and the best ruler is one whose works are unnoticed or invisible and whose virtues are so boundless as to be unnamable (A VIII.19).

25. Karma is discursive in that it occurs as a result of actions intended, of the separation of self and object (*neng-suo*). In a word, karma implies selfishness, even when it is 'good' and not 'bad' karma that is in question. Karma can, of course, bring two people together, and in this sense would seem not to serve a solely discursive function. But a karmic bond is effective only to the extent that there is some 'one' to be bound, some identity to serve as a kind of gravitational center attracting what it has already projected. However, as long as we conduct ourselves *wu-wei*, there is no 'one' to be liberated or bound. This is the bodhisattva's great challenge.

26. It might be objected that a tension exists between the exhortations made here in promotion of concourse (as opposed to discourse) and Ch'an's open encouragement of refraining from chasing after any 'good' or avoiding any 'ill'. It has, however, been my contention that concourse can arise only when there is no decision of 'right' and 'wrong', good' or 'ill'--when nothing blocks the free movement of our narration or the realization of conduct which is eminently (although perhaps not exclusively) social. Yet it is true that having conceived the realization of furthering and yet integrative relationships as concursive leaves us in the position of asserting some foundational aim or 'good'. What Ch'an would say, of course, is that seeking 'concourse' is to guarantee its continuing absence, just as seeking 'enlightenment' or 'buddhahood' is at root their forfeiture. Any 'this' can only be conceived in opposition to some 'that'. It would seem, then, that 'this' (say concourse) is really [both 'this' and 'that']. But since our

'both' implies duality--a definite shortcoming from the Buddhist standpoint--the higher 'truth' is perhaps [neither 'this' nor 'that']. Unfortunately, this begs further appeal to [both 'both this and that' and 'neither this nor that'] which regresses yet again to [neither (both 'both this and that' and 'neither this nor that') nor (not both 'both this and that' and 'neither this nor that')] and so on ad infinitum. Conception is necessarily discursive and, once begun in earnest, there can be no hair too fine to split. Ch'an advises restraint early on.

27. One of the anecdotes of the later Ch'an tradition is about a master who was once asked whether buddhas are free from karma. The master answered that they were and was born as a fox for five hundred lifetimes in retribution for his error. As the anecdote tells the story, he realized finally that even buddhas are not unaware of karma--they simply know how to use it properly.

28. Doctrinally, Ch'an produced very few treatises or commentaries of the sort that held the day in Hua-yen for instance. Instead, the primary texts of Ch'an are the *kung-an* (J:*koan*) or "public case" collections and the biographies of eminent sages, both of which consist almost entirely of anecdotes of personal, conversational encounters which end in the attainment of the concourse of enlightened master and the ripe practitioner. The centrality of kung-ans to later Ch'an and Zen practice is, of course, well known--a way of placing master and student in a communicative crisis which if successfully dealt with will lead to the realization of the latter that their mind is no different from the minds of buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.

29. A much shorter version of this story can be found in the 13th century Japanese text, the *Shaseki-shu* (Collection of Stone and Sand). See Paul Reps' Zen Flesh Zen Bones (p.24), for a translation.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 8

1. Again, truthful here denotes a dynamic quality of self-correction, not an abstract agreement of principle and fact. Truthful relationships are those that wean us of the tendency to isolate ourselves as distinct egos, bringing about more extensive and profound intimacy and virtuosity.

2. It should be added that even when we have created enough good karma to not experience the sort of material or emotional suffering that we know others sometimes do, this is not an indication that we have reached the end of practicing Ch'an. As long as the world in which we live is fraught with anger, hatred, violence and greed, as persons we are not yet living in a "pure buddha-land" and there is much left to do.

3. It should be borne in mind that this offering is not done on the basis of an altruistic feeling and does not amount to a commitment to doing good deeds. If it were, our offering would still be a form of pollution, of spreading disparity and distinction. The bodhisattva life is in a sense lived "unconsciously" and the benefit enjoyed by others is simply a "matter of course", apparently arising all by itself (*tzu jan*).

4. In other words, all the polemic regarding the split of the Northern and Southern schools is an obfuscation of the true intent of Hui-neng's teaching of readiness. The long-standing preoccupation of Chinese and Korean Buddhists with the sudden/gradual dichotomy and its resolution are thus indicative of the extent to which the Ch'an and Hua-yen traditions became detached from their own meaning.

5. The character for *li*^{C} is composed of the graph for a growing grain (*hoA*) and the graph for knife (*tao*^{A}) and implies not only advantage or gain (the result), but the knowledge that is embodied in using a knife to reap the grain we have previously sown and make good use of it. To be *li*^{C} means understanding timing and causation, knowing how to use our karma.

6. Because persons are seen as narration or a world and not as individuals, this phrasing indicates not only that we orient ourselves toward the furthering of the drama in which 'we' as egoic beings are mere players, it emphasizes the fact that serving 'others' is already serving ourselves. It is not that we will get some benefit later as a result of their 'returning the favor', but that the very gesture of serving 'others' augments our narration--fruitfully deepens the relationships constituting it.

7. The term *i-hsin* might also be rendered "whole mind" or "continuous mind" in order to de-emphasize the individualistic connotations of "one" and the suggestion that Huang-po may still be buying into the one-many distinction. I have, however, elected to translate the term as "one-mind" partly in order to stress the 'singularity' of the narration out of which 'you' and 'I' have been abstracted. More to the point, however, given the prioritization of value carried out by Buddhist 'ontology' and the recurrent theme of orientation that has recurred throughout our conversation, the term "one-mind" seems to capture the realization of a clear direction in our narration. Since mind is understood as dispositional, the term "one-mind" does not signify an independent or monolithic entity, but an unbreached compatibility of orientation in conduct.

8. The fact that we often doubt what is best for ourselves or what we are capable of is no different, indicating the kind of bifurcation without which we would find it impossible to

ask "what shall I do with my life?"--a question which can appear only when life is objectified as 'life', when living is divorced from the always communal we who live.

9. It is not possible in the space of an endnote to give a full accounting of the significance of *drsti* in Buddhist thought, but the following observations can be made. Paralleling the English use of terms like standpoint, theory and opinion, *drsti* connote a conceptual or verbal expression of a perspective on the way things are or have come to be, whether individually or collectively. All views have the unifying characteristic of taking something as their object, of being "about" something distinct from them, and can be effectively contrasted with *darsana*--a "direct seeing" in which the cognitive or conceptual component in experience is maximally attenuated it not altogether absent. Whereas *darsana* is an immediate perception of what has come to be, views are conceptually mediated, mental constructs **about** the perceived. In short, views are the abstract results of a calculative relationship with our own experience. As such, and no matter what their content, they serve to maintain the root distinction of subject and object that underlies both our fascination with being and our craving for closure.

10. The use of the same character/word for practice and what is antithetical to it strikes speakers of Indo-European languages as highly confusing. But, there are many terms in Chinese that represent a kind of marriage of opposites. Much as the English length entails both shortness and longness, many Chinese qualifiers cover both sides of what we would see as an opposition and which the Chinese respond to as relative aspects of a continuum. Thus, habitual behavior and Buddhist practice are equally expressions of conduct and what distinguishes them is not a difference in being, but of value. Thus, yin and yang are not beings that arise out of the primordial *t'ai chi*[D], but are differently and complementarily oriented expressions of it. The same can be said of Huang-po's declaration of the teaching of one-mind and his unswerving exhortations for us to have no-'mind'. One-mind and no-'mind' are again expressions of something for which we have no word or concept.

11. Thus, in deciding how to stop the tidal wave of inner city drug abuse and violence, the Reagan administration shifted the horizons of its concern to the "supplier" countries in an attempt to stop the flow of drugs into the U.S.. While this represents a correction to seeing the inner city dealer as the source of the problem, it hardly represents an open-ended appraisal of the situation. For instance, the Reagan program effectively regarded drug abuse as a criminal problem traceable to the physical addictiveness of the substances being abused. In terms of policy, the social and spiritual roots of abuse were entirely ignored. Never once, for example, did the administration question the role that television advertising plays in undermining the sense of personal worth and potential in inner-city youth. If anything, the materialist biases of the administration would likely have seen the lives portrayed in television advertising and programming as attractive goals which would give these young men and women the desire to 'better' themselves.

12. As an example of the direction a *paramārtha* approach to the drug problem would head, we can imagine policy makers questioning the role of media in altering the nature of the feedback relationship between action and perception and the possibility that this would create a propensity for what feels like frustration and what looks like laziness. Parallels to the psychology of slaves might be noted. Questions would then be raised as to whether a truly democratic society can survive when its economic base fosters the use of substance abuse to obliterate what otherwise appears to be an intractable disparity between what is desired and what is happening. The values underlying the term "abuse"

would be called to account, leading perhaps to a recognition that if sociality is held in highest regard, the coping strategies of substance abuse and working two jobs to maintain a 'close to ideal' suburban life-style may seem different and yet equally unsavory--both being characterized by a marked absence of spontaneity, individual creativity and communal intimacy.

13. Some of the patterns generated may, depending on the level of energy present in the disrupting crisis, strike us as mutant forms of "personality"--egos that have been severely deformed by either a single or a series of traumatic events. The resulting 'self' may be relatively stable--that is, self-maintaining--but completely cut off from others as is the case in certain autistic, catatonic or schizophrenic individuals. Here, stability is won at the cost of severing the lines of communication or relationship without which our world becomes socially perverse--full of variations on the themes of our imagination, but completely bereft of truly creative improvisation.

14. The importance of the vow in Ch'an pivots on just this need for a self-less cultivation of a horizonless mind. While 'we' decide to take a vow--the four great vows discussed by Hui-neng, for example (PS 21)--once taken, it is the vow and not the ego which decides what course of action is appropriate. Vows undermine the very 'selves' responsible for taking them.

15. In fact, I have elsewhere argued that according to the classical Chinese conception of the cosmos, the interdependence of all things and the realization of a world order cannot be divorced from the unexpected. For the authors of the I Ching, in the absence of the unexpected, order will always be riddled with lacunae. See Hershock, "The Structure of Change in the *I Ching*" (JCP 18:3, Fall 1991).

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 9

1. Seen as a system of distinctions or value projections which exists only through the deflection and retention of energy, the 'self' is not at all illusory, but marks the presence of a relatively stable ordering of relationships which is itself neither good nor bad but which is maintained precisely on the basis of determining what is desirable, what is undesirable, and what makes no 'real' difference.

For the relationship between such a conditional existence of 'self' and judgments, see the account of perception given in the Madhupindika Sutta where it is made clear that when feeling (*vedanā*)--or the judgment of pleasant, unpleasant or neutral--arises on the basis of contact (*phassa*) between the appropriate sense consciousness, its organ and its object, so does the experience of one who perceives. "Because of contact arises feeling; what **one** feels, **one** perceives; what **one** perceives, **one** reasons about; what **one** reasons about, **one** proliferates conceptually; what **one** proliferates conceptually, due to that concepts characterized by such obsessed perceptions assail him..." (MN I 111, emphasis added).

2. A myriad psychological and ego-historical reasons for this difficulty exist, of course, and delineating them is the typical student's most effective and clandestine method of insuring the uninterrupted existence of both his or her difficulties and the 'selves' they protect. Digging into the reasons why we find it so hard to let go of our 'selves' is a diversion from doing so--a way of forestalling the advent of true practice. Recall in this regard the story of the Buddha meeting a man who has been shot in the chest with an arrow and who insists on knowing who shot him and why before pulling it out and stitching the wound. Since the roots of our present situation extend back into beginningless time, we will never have a full accounting of how and why we have come to be where and as we are. Better to begin in earnest the task of relinquishing our 'selves' than analyzing the causes for our difficulty in doing so.

3. It should be allowed that since the process of relinquishing our 'selves' is synonymous with realizing our true natures--with realizing who we are as persons and not merely as individuals--this partner or partners with whom we enter into concourse can manifest in or as any part of our narration. In short, they need not be human. Thus, while most of the enlightenment stories collected in the records of Ch'an involve a student-master interaction, there are cases where the help needed in relinquishing the 'self' is afforded by a stone striking a stalk of bamboo, by the honking of flock of geese, by the moonlight shining through a tracery of autumn branches.

4. For a convenient table listing the symbolic attributes of the trigrams, see Govinda 1981:46-47.

5. Huang-po's remarks here may be a Buddhist gloss on a renowned passage in the Analects where Confucius remarks that, "The virtue of an exemplary person is wind while that of the small person is grass. As the wind blows, the grass bends." (A XII.19) It is the quality of our personal energy (*te*) which determines the actions of those around us.

6. There is a story in the oral tradition of Korean Son (Ch'an) which takes up precisely this theme. The master at one of the larger training monasteries in Korea was often given to sitting in his rooms reading, taking long walks and napping during the designated training periods. The head monk finally reproached him for his laziness and accused him of doing nothing at all in his role as master. The master shrugged off the remark, but a

week later he called the head monk in to inform him that he would be taking over the monastery for a month or two while the master journeyed south. From the day the master departed, things at the monastery began to go wrong. The monks began feeling out of sorts and edgy. Factions developed and soon a bitter controversy split the community. Hundreds of monks simply left. Others remained for a month, hoping the master would return and sort things out, but most of them eventually moved elsewhere. When the master did finally return after some three months absence, the head monk was in a state of total dismay. The master listened as he chronicled the downfall of the monastery and then nodded. "And here I thought I wasn't doing a thing!"

7. Of course, what makes us "human" is also a shared complex of distinctions--a shared karma that has us born in similar bodies and behaving in much the same way. Our distinctions--our values--are thus what identifies and differentiates us as members of the human race, from which it follows that we can completely divorce ourselves from making distinctions only at the expense of no longer maintaining an existence.

8. What is crucially at stake here is a shift in attitude from conceiving of ourselves first and foremost as doers and makers to seeing ourselves principally in terms of responding and allowing. That is, instead of positing ourselves as points of origin, we see ourselves as unique and yet ultimately inseparable phases in the articulation of an always communal narration. To be sure, part of our uniqueness is the character of what Heidegger included under the rubric of our throwness--our concrete limitations due to when and where we were born--and which Buddhists see as one aspect of our individual and individuating karma. When a person is conceived primarily as responding, however, these limits have nowhere near the kind of negative connotation proper to an outlook determined by a drive to produce. Instead, and much as a trumpet player not only accepts but appreciates the difference between the responses she can offer a rhythm section and those possible for a pianist, each of us not only accepts but deeply appreciates the formal constraints proper to our particular karma. We play with and not against our limitations. Only in this way is the world capable of being seen as our partner and not a ubiquitous source of resistance--something the 'maker' must always feel.

9. While the attainment of *shou-i* was in the later Taoist tradition almost invariably thought of as part of an alchemical transformation by means of which the body came to be endowed with what would normally be thought of as supernatural powers, at least in the early Buddhist era of China the preoccupation with attaining powers and immortality had not entirely overshadowed the essential 'self'-lessness implicit to the attainment of *wu-wei*. That Ch'an did not, and in spite of plenty of miraculous powers being attributed to bodhisattvas and buddhas in the later Mahayana sutras, follow in the Taoist footsteps here is clear in Ma-tzu's claim that "even if you were to get as far as splitting the body, emanating light and manifesting the 18 transformations"--all powers associated with the alchemical transformation of the body--"they would be like unsevered barbs and chains. If you awaken sagely mind, everything without remainder is served." (TTC 45.406b)

10. For a discussion of the relationship between beneficence or being expert (*shan*) and suppuration (*lou*), see HTC 119.423b. *Lou* is difficult to directly translate, but it typically refers to a negative discharge through the sense organs--an effluent which contaminates what is sensed. In a literal sense, it is having a "juandicing eye" and is the counterpart of being stained by things in the environment. In short, being stained and staining is a 'self'-perpetuating cycle of negative energy.

11. The use of the term "chakra" is here largely a matter of convenience. For example, if the Freudian terms "id" and "superego" were substituted for the lower and upper chakras and ego for whatever is self-consciousness, the point stands that self-consciousness is not the sole criterion for some act being 'self'-generated. The 'self' includes all of our inclinations and dispositions--all of our karma--and so involves what is usually below as well as above conscious awareness.

12. Of course, 'we' will only be willing to do so to the extent that we are convinced there is something to attain by doing so. That is, we are promised what might be called "dharma candy"--a nice prize for unrelentingly carrying out our discipline. This "candy" may be called "equanimity" or "better concentration" or "relaxation" or "a better future birth" or even "enlightenment", but these are all just verbal lures. As mentioned before, even the Buddha himself attained nothing when he realized complete and perfect enlightenment (*anuttara samyak saṁbodhi*). Neither shall 'we'.

13. The term *"chien"* carries a very wide range of connotations including "to see," "to perceive," "to meet," "to interview," "to introduce," and "to manifest". I would submit that Hui-neng did not discount any of these. To the contrary, all of these seem implied in a personal understanding of *chien fo.*

14. The association of artistic genius, intuition and madness in our culture is indicative of the extent to which creativity and improvisation are mistrusted and resisted as anarchic in the most negative sense of the term. That is, we typically think of artistic genius as being cultivated--if at all--only by breaking societal norms, by forcing ourselves into situations where no habit will allow us to survive. We must flirt with psychic and spiritual disaster to produce great art--often without any approval or encouragement from our contemporaries. By contrast, artistic genius and hence creativity in China were seen as models for all social relation and the standard education in ritual, music, calligraphy, archery, charioteering and calculation was heavily biased toward activities where improvisation and intuition were highly valued.

15. In the final case, what Lin-chi steals nothing because the student is at the point where he or she need only be challenged with the roar of a keen-eyed master to leap to the occasion and respond as a bodhisattva. See T 1985.501b, where he discusses these four kinds of students and their various needs.

16. This is especially notable in cases where the shocks are either accidental or 'self'-induced through fasting, isolation, extreme physical exertion or the use of psychedelic or other consciousness-altering plants or substances. There is a substantial body of religious and anthropological literature regarding mystic experience which bears out the same fact--initial insights or revelations are not only typically the most profound, successive experiences often serve only to so isolate the experiencer that they no longer find it possible to enter into full community with others. In this sense, mystic experience has at times been rightfully regarded as dysfunctional. Ch'an tries to forestall this disjunction by seeing the moment of enlightenment as irreducibly social--a matter of responding to others as needed and not achieving some transcendence of or freedom from concrete, daily relationship with others.

NOTES CHAPTER 10

1. This does not mean, of course, that a bodhisattva or buddha will never work to bring about factual change or that such changes will not eventually attend the gestalt shift by means of which the work of enlightenment is actually enacted. What a buddha does not do is to get involved with trying to **cause** factual changes--say in the standard of living, of health, of education and so on--with the intent of that precipitating liberation. Not only would such activity be karmic or binding in the long run, it is simply ineffective. In the same way that no circumstance is not enlightening for the true bodhisattva, every circumstance is binding for a sentient being.

2. The phrase "engaging others" is, of course, sensible only where difference and identity obtain. The bodhisattva does not make these and so cannot properly be said to engage any 'one'. Nor should a bodhisattva be conceived as a 'one'. As person, the bodhisattva is not 'one' or 'many', but that out of which these are abstracted.

3. Made into an ideal, of course, this kind of freedom from circumstance can make for lives of wanton 'self' and 'other' abuse. Again, 'you' and 'i' cannot act like buddhas and the desire to do so is indication of our inability to pull it off. Anyone who tries to live the free and easy life is doing no more than indulging the 'self' and binding both her or himself and others.

CHINESE GLOSSARY

chan	戰
ch'an-chi[A]	禪機
chao	照
chen ju	真如
cheng	正
cheng-pen-hsing	正本性
chi[B]*-mieh*	寂滅
ch'i-chih-ch'u-chi	棄知除己
ch'i[A] *hsin*	起信
ch'i[B]	氣
ch'i[B]*-hsi*	氣習
ch'i[B]*-hsiang*[A]	氣象
chia	家
chien	漸
chien-fo	見佛
chih	知
chih[A]*-hui*	智慧
ch'in	親
ching	境
ching[A]	精

erh	耳
fa chan	法戰
ho	和
ho[A]	禾
ho[B]	何
hsi-ch'i[B]	習氣
hsiang	相
hsin-ti	心土
hsin[A]	信
hsing	性
hsing[A]	行
hsueh	學
hui	慧
hun	魂
i-hsin	一心
jen	仁
jen[A]	人
kang	綱
ken	根
k'ou	口
kung-an	公案

kuan	關
kuei	鬼
k'ung	空
li	禮
li[A]	豊
li[B]	理
li[C]	利
lou	漏
mei-ch'i[A]*-erh*[A]*-i*[A]	默 契 而 已
mi	米
miao-yung	妙 用
mien	面
ming	明
ming[A]	命
neng-suo	能 所
pen-hsing	本 性
pen-t'i	本 體
pien	邊
p'i	疋
p'ing-ch'ang-hsin-shih[C]*-tao*	平 常 心 是 道
p'o	魄
pu-shih[A]	布 施

pu-te	布德
p'u-hsein	普賢
shan	善
she-i-ch'ieh'-fa	攝一切法
shen	神
sheng	生
shou	受
shou-i	守一
sui-shih-ying-yung	遂事應用
szu-ch'i[A]	司契
ta-ch'eng-ch'i[A]*-hsin*[A]*-lun*	大乘起信論
ta-ho	大和
ta-she[A]	大捨
t'ai-chi[D]	太極
tao	刀
tao[A]	道
tao-chi[C]*-t'ung-liu*	道即通流
te	德
t'i	體
t'ien	天
ting-ping	定病

t'ou	頭
tseng-shang-man-jen[A]	增上慢人
tso	作
t'so-chan	坐禪
tu	度
tui	對
tun-wu[B]	頓悟
tun[A]	鈍
t'ung	通
tzu-chia	自家
tzu-jan	自然
tzu-tsai	自在
t'zu-pei-ta-shih[B]	慈悲大士
wei[A]*-hsin*	唯心
wen	文
wen-shu	文殊
wu-hsin	無心
wu-i[A]	無依
wu-lou	無漏
wu-men	無門
wu-nien	無念
wu-suo-chu	無所住

wu-tsao-tso	無造作
wu-wei	無爲
wu-wei[A]*-chen-jen*[A]	無位眞人
wu-wo	無我
yan	言
yang	陽
yin	陰
ying-chi[A]*-chien-wu*[A]	應機接物
yu-wei	有爲
yueh	月
yung	用

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